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*‘...plunge with me into the very depths of Nature’:  
Gustav Mahler’s Third Symphony as critical  
engagement with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.*

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## ABSTRACT

### **‘...plunge with me into the very depths of Nature’: Gustav Mahler's Third Symphony as critical engagement with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.**

EDWARD PAUL MOORE

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts by Research in Musicology – Durham University

Mahler's Third Symphony, it may be argued, is the most divisive of his oeuvre. Epically proportioned, it is criticised for what some perceive to be structural inadequacies, but also for a seemingly insurmountable number of extra-musical associations and ideas which serve to cloud contemporary understanding of the work. This thesis fundamentally disagrees with the commonly accepted structural division of the work as bi-partite, and sets forward an alternative which argues that the symphony is fundamentally a contribution to the debate surrounding Nietzsche's evolving philosophy at the time of composition. This interpretation manifests itself in a restructuring of the symphony as tri-partite: the first movement existing independently as a method by which to articulate to the listener the Nietzschean path the rest of the symphony will take. The second group represents the 'Chain of Being' which Mahler ultimately exposes as false (as he does the Christian faith in the fifth movement) through subtle and not-so-subtle musical and textual subversion, whilst the final movement – the *Adagio* – once again stands independently, and articulates a clear process of 'self-overcoming' which is inextricably linked to the idea of the *Übermensch*, as discussed in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

Such an approach to Mahler's Third Symphony necessarily considers in quite some detail the letters and comments left behind by the composer himself, as well as other critics' and scholars' opinions where relevant. It does attempt, however, to avoid getting bogged down in programmatic disagreements, and ultimately, sheds its programmatic shackles in order to better appreciate the work in-and-of itself.

Durham University

**‘...plunge with me into the very depths of Nature’:  
Gustav Mahler's Third Symphony as critical engagement with the  
philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts by Research**

in

**Musicology**

by

**Edward Paul Moore**

**2013**



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**List of Abbreviations:**

*BGE* – ‘Beyond Good and Evil’ by Friedrich Nietzsche

*BT* – ‘The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music’ by Friedrich Nietzsche

*TSZ* – ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra’ by Friedrich Nietzsche

*TGS* – ‘The Gay Science’ by Friedrich Nietzsche

AM – Alma Mahler

AS – Alma Mahler (née Schindler)

ASl – Arthur Seidl

AvM – Anna v. Mildenburg

BW – Bruno Walter

FL – Friedrich Löhr

GM – Gustav Mahler

HB – Hermann Behn

MM – Max Marschalk

NBL – Natalie Bauer-Lechner

RB – Richard Batke

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# Introduction

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Mahler's Third Symphony, perhaps more than any other of his significant orchestral works, divides opinion. Amongst those who find it problematical, the perennial criticism of Mahler's grasp of large-scale structures is often cited, in relation to the symphony as a whole, but more specifically to the vast opening movement (described famously by Deryck Cooke as a 'partial failure'<sup>1</sup>). Such criticism is unsurprising, particularly with relation to 'Part I', but this is a work which on many levels transcends conventional structural definitions – and which is partly defined by those transcendences.

Whilst there are many opinions regarding the work's 'success' as a piece of music, opinions regarding the issue of the work's 'meaning' are even more multifarious. Confusion abounds regarding the authority of various programmes, and whether those programmes, subsequently retracted by the composer, ought to be consulted at all. Mahler himself made so many comments, both in writing and in conversations with a variety of acquaintances on the subject of the Third Symphony and what various aspects of it are 'about', that interpretations of the symphony as a whole are plenteous and often contradictory. At their most basic level, these interpretations range from 'fundamentally Christian' to 'fundamentally Nietzschean', and all points between. Indeed, somewhat dispiritingly, Jeremy Barham points out that:

Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging the existence of such meaning in his own works, [Mahler] doubted the ability of conceptual programmes to reveal this content adequately: '[a] residue of mystery always remains – even for the creator!'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cooke, Deryck, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, London: Faber & Faber, 1980. Page 13.

<sup>2</sup> Barham, Jeremy M., *Mahler's Third Symphony and the Philosophy of Gustav Fechner: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Criticism, Analysis and Interpretation.*, Ph.D. Diss: University of Surrey, 1998. Page 76.

This thesis, however, offers a unique reading of the Third Symphony which argues that it is best understood as comprising three distinct ‘groups’. The first is made up of ‘Part I’ – that is, the first movement – the second is movements two through to five, and the final group is made up solely of the *Adagio*: the final movement. This tripartite structure supports the fundamental argument made by this thesis that Mahler is, in this symphony, rejecting both the conventional (and Christianly-influenced) conception of creation (which may be found depicted and subverted in ‘Group II’), and the pessimistic Schopenhauerian notion that existence is fundamentally a painful and pointless affair, and instead offers a Nietzschean alternative, in which man comes to recognise his ‘oneness’ with nature, and achieves the status of *Übermensch*, as articulated in *TSZ*. The opening chapter considers some of the key Nietzschean ideas which are relevant to the subsequent chapters, and, more broadly, discusses Nietzsche’s relationship with art, music, and, most specifically, Richard Wagner. This chapter aims to lay the foundations upon which the above thesis will be articulated.

The second chapter discusses the second and third movements of the symphony, as a pair, and considers how their structure, which in both cases is an adapted version of a conventionally recognised existing structure, begins to suggest that the depiction which Mahler provides of ‘Nature’ is rather more than that, and that there is a subtext. This subtext becomes clearly Nietzschean in the third movement, where a profound sense of opposition becomes visible – the chapter discusses at length the importance of the posthorn solos, both in-themselves, and as opposing thematic material to music which will come to be shown to be ‘anthropomorphised’ animal-music. The seemingly innocuous music comes to be shown to be signalling that such a view of the animals’ environment is a naïve one, and that Mahler is actually articulating a profoundly ‘broken’ Pastoral, in an attempt to demonstrate its unsustainability.

Chapter Three unavoidably considers the importance of text within the Third Symphony, and does so through an in-depth study of the fourth and fifth movements, which it views as interconnected. The text set in the fourth movement – Nietzsche’s ‘Midnight Song’ – is interrogated, and Mahler’s treatment of it considered, but its prime importance is shown to be the vehicle by which it is articulated – the human voice. ‘Man’s’ introduction in the Chain of Being is a profoundly important moment in the symphony, and this chapter examines how the actual text and the importance of its method of presentation combine to give what is perhaps the most firmly ‘Nietzschean’ associations of the work. The fifth movement, which utilises Christian imagery somewhat heavily, is proven to be inextricably linked to the fourth; through a discussion of the use of the bell, the use of the child (and thereby: *Humour*), the fifth movement comes to be understood as an articulation of the ‘false alternative’ of the organised Christian faith which Nietzsche spent so much time attempting to deconstruct.

The fourth chapter discusses the finale – the *Adagio* – but also considers the implications of the movement which ultimately became the finale of the Fourth Symphony, but which began life as the closing movement of the Third. It dismisses the oft-suggested interpretation of the sixth movement which sees it as somehow ‘about’ the Christian God, and suggests that, whilst the original finale articulated a deep scepticism of Christianity, Mahler felt he could remove it, and allow the *Adagio* to function as a great ‘climax of Being’, in which there is no need any more to reject the ‘current’ system, but in which Mahler could suggest a profoundly Nietzschean alternative of ‘self-overcoming’.

Finally, Chapter Five considers the opening movement of the symphony. It makes an attempt to rationalise the vast array of programmatic statements made by Mahler regarding this movement – which are often contradictory – and discusses the

implications of its being composed last. It suggests, in short, that the first movement can only be appreciated by discarding written programmes, and following Mahler's advice to 'plunge with me into the very depths of Nature'<sup>3</sup> – in other words – *participating in* and *experiencing* the movement, not simply listening to it. This chapter proffers that the first movement of the Third Symphony is a catastrophic failure of programmaticism, but one which articulates a rejection of the pessimistic, Schopenhauerian view of the nature of Being, suggesting instead the fundamentally affirmative Nietzschean alternative – demonstrating to the listener that this is the path this work will take.

Broadly speaking, therefore, this thesis suggests that the first movement acts as a form of introduction – dismissing the prevalent Schopenhauerian pessimism, and leaving the listener in no doubt as to the Nietzschean path this work will take. Movements II-V are, in short, a presentation of the falsehood of the Chain of Being, atop of which sits man. This 'second group' makes many other points, for example, the ridiculing of the expression of faith in the fifth movement; these are dealt with in the individual chapters, but, at the most basic level, Mahler is mocking this view of nature. The final movement – the *Adagio* – stands alone, and articulates the process of 'self-overcoming' – the achievement of the status of *Übermensch* – without needing to recourse to any further negativity with regard to the 'current' system. This three-group structure is a unique idea, and one which serves to better structure the Third Symphony, which is, this thesis suggests, a contribution to the debate surrounding Nietzsche's work at the time of its composition.

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<sup>3</sup> An account of a conversation between GM and NBL on 4 July 1896, in 'Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber.' Page 61/2.

# Chapter One: Nietzsche, Art & Mahler

## – an Introduction

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In the history of philosophy, there has perhaps never been an individual so comprehensively misunderstood or misrepresented as *Friedrich Nietzsche*. Appointed to a professorship of Philology at the University of Basel at the age of only twenty-four, and without first completing his doctorate, Nietzsche was soon to turn his keen intellect towards Philosophy, the discipline for which he is famous today. Whilst some have attributed to him the title of ‘Father of postmodern philosophy’<sup>1</sup>, many others have (mis)understood Nietzsche’s philosophy to be quite the opposite of its actual nature. Claims such as the infamous ‘death of God’<sup>2</sup> have come to exist independently of their reasoning, resulting in a quite grotesque misinterpretation, which by its very outrageousness obscures much of Nietzsche’s other work. Indeed, whilst some ‘...have taken his critical stance to be so sweeping that it is tantamount to a repudiation of philosophy itself, either heralding its end...or demonstrating his irrelevance to it...’<sup>3</sup>, others view him as the prophet of a future-oriented philosophy, in which he seeks to argue against the pessimism manifest in the works (particularly) of the man whose writings kindled the young Nietzsche’s passion for philosophy: *Schopenhauer*. As Richard Schacht points out:

[Nietzsche] has come to be associated in recent years with the effort to “deconstruct” many of the basic concepts and ideas central to our thinking about meaning and mattering, the problematic character of which tended to go unrecognized even among philosophers; but while this is appropriate enough as far as it goes, he deserves to be associated no less importantly with the effort to

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<sup>1</sup> Schacht, Richard. ‘Friedrich Nietzsche’. In *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel, 390-411. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001. Page 390.

<sup>2</sup> Found in Book III of Nietzsche’s 1882 book *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* [The Gay Science].

<sup>3</sup> Schacht, Richard. ‘Friedrich Nietzsche’. In *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel, 390-411. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001. Page 391.



“reconstruct” the conceptual means of proceeding to reinterpret and revalue the many things requiring to be reconsidered in the aftermath of such “deconstruction”<sup>4</sup>

This may well be true, but, as Michael Tanner bluntly states:

His underlying view [is] that if we don't [sic] make a drastically new start we are doomed, since we are living in the wreckage of two thousand and more years of fundamentally mistaken ideas about almost everything that matters...<sup>5</sup>

The fact that Tanner here places emphasis on the deconstructionist bent to Nietzsche's works, in apparent ignorance of Schacht's warnings is just one example (if a reasonably fundamental one) of how different scholars of renown can come to, if not opposing then certainly differing, conclusions. Whilst in the field of philosophy it is hardly uncommon for varying interpretations of key ideas to be offered, such oppositions seem to be more common in the study of Nietzsche than in that of many other philosophers. The reasoning behind this is simple: Nietzsche had no philosophical 'system' to further, no complete 'idea' to defend – rather, his philosophy was ultimately developmental, a genuine life's work in which changes of mind were simply an occupational hazard, and which, when they did occur, were not necessarily well signalled. That is not to say that Nietzsche did not have an ultimate purpose which underpinned his work – far from it:

Nietzsche's fundamental concern throughout his life was to plot the relationship between suffering and culture, or cultures. He categorizes and grades cultures by the way in which they have coped with the omnipresence of suffering, and assesses moralities by the same criterion. That is why he was interested in tragedy, but lost interest when he came to feel that it was not a contemporary possibility. It is why he was always passionately preoccupied with the heroic, in life rather than art, and needing eventually to be rebaptised as the *Übermensch*. It is the basis of his attack on transcendent metaphysics, and on all religions that postulate an afterlife. And of course it was of primary 'existential' concern to him, because his life was suffering.<sup>6</sup>

Put simply, Nietzsche's writings do not together form separate, but contributory, strands of one overarching system, but rather they act as a record of Nietzsche's developing thinking, often in unrelated ways.

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<sup>4</sup> Schacht, Richard. 'Friedrich Nietzsche'. In *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel, 390-411. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001. Page 391/2.

<sup>5</sup> Tanner, Michael 'Nietzsche'. In *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Thomas, 339-435. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Page 348.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* at 373.

**Contemporary Reception & Engagement**

Nietzsche's 'style', if you will – his reputation as a kind of *enfant terrible* of nineteenth-century philosophy – as well as his unorthodox method of presenting his thought, unsurprisingly attracted a great deal of attention, both positive and negative. The sources of this attention are diverse, but for an artist like Gustav Mahler, engaging with that thought was tantamount to unavoidable. Nietzsche and Richard Wagner's intellectual and personal relationship was well-known; Mahler's admiration of Wagner would undoubtedly have encouraged his own exploration of Nietzsche's work, whilst the broader intellectual domain in which Mahler was operating early-on in his career – particularly the *Pernerstorfer Circle* – was just the arena in which Nietzsche's thinking was being discussed and developed. The fact that Nietzsche's work was so recent, and that the author was still 'developing' his thought meant that critical evaluation of Nietzsche's ideas was as fresh as it could be; there was not yet any set interpretation which could be subject to revision – any interpretation and development was *new*, and just as valid as any other, a state of affairs which would certainly have been a tantalising prospect for contemporary intellectuals.

In the absence of a defined 'system', therefore, any analysis of Nietzsche's thinking must remain alert to the necessity of considering his output as evolutionary – that is to say, rather than simply looking in one particular publication for Nietzsche's opinion on a specific issue, it is often vital to consider his comment across his productive lifetime, and not to discount certain ideas because they seem to contradict a previous statement.

Nietzsche was driven by suffering; both the experience and contemplation of it, and, whilst this is a valid observation, perhaps a less abstract description of the underlying forces behind Nietzsche's philosophy is required in order to begin to form an understanding of his thinking:

Nietzsche drove himself with such urgency...out of an intense and profound concern with the crisis he believed threatened the very future of humanity, which he came to characterize in terms of the “death of God” and “the advent of nihilism”. He was convinced that the interpretive and evaluative foundations of our entire Western culture and civilization were eroding, as traditional ways of thinking about ourselves and the world and about meaning and value were losing their capacity to convince and sustain us; that neither other cultures nor modern science nor the resources of reason and the arts nor the recourses of ideology, nationalism or other such would-be substitutes for religion were capable of filling the void; and that, unless a new sort of thinking could show the way out of and beyond this predicament, the human prospect would be bleak indeed.<sup>7</sup>

That Nietzsche was profoundly influenced by Schopenhauer is well-known – it was Schopenhauer’s writing that drove Nietzsche’s ‘conversion’ from Philology to Philosophy – and that influence is patent here; but there is a key difference, as Schacht goes on to point out, claiming that ‘Schopenhauer had in effect posed the same basic challenge starkly; but Nietzsche was determined to try to find some way of avoiding his profoundly pessimistic conclusion and its life-negating implications.’<sup>8</sup> This attitude was a popular one with contemporary figures such as Mahler; Schopenhauer’s negativity was becoming subject to critical revision – revision with which artists and thinkers were becoming more involved. Nietzsche’s work, can, then, be characterised as being inspired by a desire to expose the ways in which the erosion of traditional methods of thought threaten humanity – a phenomenon which was a fundamental part of the increasing prominence of nihilism as precipitated by the work of Schopenhauer. Whilst Nietzsche’s writing may be considered as a series of ‘projects’:

What unites these projects is Nietzsche’s strongly held view that metaphysics has come to an end and reached a crisis-point. By metaphysics he means something quite specific, namely, belief in something unconditioned, i.e. something which would be true, absolutely and unconditionally, outside of all temporal and perspectival conditions. In addition to this belief in a “true” world that stands outside time, history, and nature, metaphysics also refers for Nietzsche to the positing of supernatural and imaginary causes, forces, and entities, to a preoccupation with the otherworldly, to an ascetic denial of human impulses and

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<sup>7</sup> Schacht, Richard. ‘Friedrich Nietzsche’. In *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel, 390-411. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001. Page 395/6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* at 396. The ‘pessimistic conclusion’ to which Schacht refers is that which results from Schopenhauer’s analysis of the ‘Will’ (-to live; humans’ basic desires); that is, that the human condition is ultimately painful, and the only way life was to be made tolerable was through an ascetic lifestyle. Perhaps fundamentally, Schopenhauer perceived human desires to be pointless, a claim which dictates his ultimate perception of all human action in the world as similarly futile.

drives that comes close to a pathological hatred of the human, and a quest to encounter the “thing-in-itself” (another term for the “true” world).<sup>9</sup>

### **Nietzsche, Art & Music – ‘*The Birth of Tragedy*’**

First published in 1872, with the title ‘*The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*’, Nietzsche’s first significant contribution to the world of philosophical scholarship was not well received. Academic opinion was particularly scathing, and a somewhat undignified spat between supporters and opponents of Nietzsche’s work erupted. The dedicatee of the book, Richard Wagner, was pleased with it; perhaps understandably given his somewhat exalted position, in Nietzsche’s eyes, which is a key tenet of the work. Written rather ‘unacademically’ for the era, *BT* epitomises Nietzsche’s perception of his work as an (aforementioned) series of ‘projects’ which ought to exist in a unified state, but which struggle to do so because of his revisionist approach to his own philosophising:

The forces which were operating on him when he wrote the book were powerful and various enough for it to be a foregone conclusion that the result would be a weird hybrid. Like most people with a set of very strong passions, and a powerful urge to communicate them, he was convinced that they were intimately connected, and that they proceeded from a central core of concern which the writing of the book would locate for his readers, and also for himself.<sup>10</sup>

*BT* is, in the words, once again, of Michael Tanner:

...a whirlwind of a book, swept along by the intensity of its strange set of enthusiasms and its desire to cope with as many topics as possible in a short space, but masquerading as a historical account of why Greek tragedy lasted for so short a time, and arguing that it had recently been reborn in the mature works of Richard Wagner.<sup>11</sup>

This account of the book is perhaps purposefully a little broad, but it serves a useful purpose in pointing the reader towards an understanding of the central themes of the text.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Nietzsche Reader* (edited by Pearson, K.A. & Large, D.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner), *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page ix.

<sup>11</sup> Tanner, Michael ‘Nietzsche’. In *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Thomas, 339-435. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Page 351.

Nietzsche claims that:

We will have achieved much for the discipline of aesthetics when we have arrived not only at the logical insight but also at the immediate certainty of the view that the continuing development of art is tied to the duality of the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian*: just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, which are engaged in a continual struggle interrupted only by temporary periods of reconciliation.<sup>12</sup>

This ‘duality’ is a concept upon which Nietzsche dwells for most of the book. He goes on to argue that the relationship of the Apollonian and Dionysian within art was at its most wholesome in the tragic art of Ancient Greece, where:

...there existed a tremendous opposition, in terms of origin and goals, between the Apollonian art of the sculptor, and the imageless Dionysian art of music: these two very different drives run in parallel with one another, for the most part diverging openly with one another and continually stimulating each other to ever new and more powerful births, in order to perpetuate in themselves the struggle of that opposition only apparently bridged by the shared name of ‘art’; until finally, through a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic ‘will’, they appear coupled with one another...<sup>13</sup>

Once Nietzsche has established the nature of the relationship between the Apolline and the Dionysian, and points at the music-dramas of ancient Greece as the epitome of that relationship in functioning form, he goes on to claim that the ‘balance’ between the two poles (in order that one does not overcome the other) ceased to be ideal with the writing of Euripides (because of the playwright’s overwhelming interest in ‘the individual’ rather than the – more appropriate, in Nietzsche’s eyes – focus on ‘the chorus’ epitomised by the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles), and has become steadily more imbalanced ever since. The result of this imbalance (towards the Apollonian) is that man becomes increasingly nihilistic, perceiving life to be futile and pointless, and beginning to console itself with ideas of a better life beyond – believing the only way life could be perceived to be tolerable is to imagine some form of ‘reward’ after it. Broadly speaking, Nietzsche argues that a certain amount of Dionysian exposure is absolutely necessary in order to maintain a grasp on the point of living; the Dionysian

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<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. ‘The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music’. In *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson & Duncan Large, 42-87. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006. Page 42.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

experience causes the sense of being an individual to be overcome, and man realises that he is part of a greater whole, an experience likened by Nietzsche thus:

If one were to allow one's imagination free rein in transforming Beethoven's 'Hymn to Joy' into a painting, particularly the moment when the multitudes kneel down awestruck in the dust: then one might come close to an idea of the Dionysian. Now, with the gospel of world-harmony, each man feels himself not only reunified, reconciled, reincorporated, and merged with his neighbour, but genuinely one, as if the veil of Maya had been rent and only its shreds still fluttered in front of the mysterious original Unity.<sup>14</sup>

For Nietzsche, then, art – specifically: tragic art – is *the* way in which man can come to tolerate existence; an idea which he found (temporarily re-) epitomised in the works of Richard Wagner, and which interested a wide range of contemporary artists. A duality between the Dionysian (to which exposure to neat, as it were, is distinctly undesirable) and the Apollonian (to which a similar caveat applies) is essential, and, Nietzsche argues, only discoverable in the mature works of Richard Wagner:

Art, that is, always, even at its most Dionysiac, possesses form, and thus up to a point falsifies its subject-matter, which is a formless swirl of pain-cum-pleasure, with pain predominating. But it needs to perform this falsification, for otherwise we would find it unendurable. Thus, much later in the book when he is discussing Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, Nietzsche claims that it has to be a drama, because in dramas there are characters, i.e. individuals, which means that Apollo is playing his part. In Act III of the drama, Tristan the character interposes between us and Wagner's music; Tristan mediates the experience which causes him to die, and we survive, having come as close as possible to direct contact with the primal reality. So tragic heroes are sacrificial victims, and we achieve 'redemption', a favourite term of Wagner's as well as of Christians, which Nietzsche was shortly to regret having used...<sup>15</sup>

### **'The Birth of Tragedy' and Gustav Mahler**

The ideas developed in *BT* undoubtedly intrigued Mahler. It is important to remember that for figures such as Mahler, these ideas had the potential to be *fundamental* and life-changing, and were not simply to be viewed as interesting asides. For that reason, to suggest that any particular work of art – in the case of this thesis, a musical composition – takes as its *programme* Nietzschean ideas is a fundamentally flawed assertion. Mahler knew better than to use a composition as a descriptive vehicle

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. 'The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music'. In *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson & Duncan Large, 42-87. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006. Page 45.

<sup>15</sup> Tanner, Michael 'Nietzsche'. In *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Thomas, 339-435. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Page 358.

for superficial and novel ideas, in which they are showcased and critiqued; rather, this thesis argues that the Third Symphony particularly is a work which is based upon a Nietzschean outlook, but that accepts that the very nature of Nietzsche's work, and the intellectual terrain of the day necessarily means that such an interaction with the work of Nietzsche necessarily manifests itself as a constructive *contribution* to the constellation of thought of the era, rather than a simple 'snapshot' of it.

### **Nietzsche, God & the Third Symphony**

In the context of the Third Symphony, Nietzsche's suggestion that 'God is dead' is hugely important, particularly given the Christian imagery Mahler uses in certain movements. As such, a more in-depth consideration of what is perhaps Nietzsche's most notorious, and possibly misunderstood, assertion, which occurs in Book III of his 1887 (in its second, and better known, incarnation) publication *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*: 'The Gay Science' (hereafter *TGS*), is necessary:

'New battles. – After Buddha was dead, they still showed his shadow in a cave for centuries – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow. – And we – we must still defeat his shadow as well.'<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, the most important thing to realise regarding Nietzsche's ideas about God's 'death' is that it (in this context) matters little whether God ever really 'existed' or not; Nietzsche, rather, is interested in the causes of such belief in the first place, and, more importantly, the implications of '...the belief in the Christian God [having] become unbelievable.'<sup>17</sup>:

...over the course of centuries belief in God has eroded without people noticing what was happening. Its deepest consequence will be for values, because, as Nietzsche expresses it in an unpublished note: 'He who does not find greatness in God finds in nowhere. He must either deny it or create it.' And if we have the burden of creating

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<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. Bernard Williams), *Nietzsche: The Gay Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Page 109.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

greatness, then most of us, maybe all, will buckle under the weight. And without greatness life has no point, even if the greatness is beyond our reach.<sup>18</sup>

As the above quotation hints, Nietzsche's preoccupation was necessarily: what fills the gap left by God? – or, as Bernard Williams points out in his introduction to the Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy edition of *GS*, '...Nietzsche struggles with the question of what act of creation, by whom, might overcome the emptiness left by the collapse of traditional illusions.'<sup>19</sup> This is a quotation that will be shown to be enormously relevant to Mahler's Third Symphony, wherein the imagery used is primarily not 'of' a Christian God. As discussed in the previous section on *BT*, when the Christian God is removed from man's rationalisation of existence (and, more importantly, all the Christian paraphernalia associated with Him is also ousted, most notably: the concept of the afterlife), the deficiency of balance in art becomes even more fatal: if man cannot console himself with the idea of a better life beyond the one he is living, and art cannot offer the blend of Apolline and Dionysian necessary to prevent a Schopenhauerian (pessimistic) view of existence, then Nietzsche's logic dictates that he believe that '...the death of God would have vast and catastrophic consequences.'<sup>20</sup>

Whilst Nietzsche's comment on God specifically is reasonably impersonal, when he widens his sights so as to address Christianity as a whole, he becomes often explosively critical. *TGS* is scattered with anti-Christian sentiment, from the shortest of seemingly disconnected paragraphs ('The Christian decision to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad.'<sup>21</sup>) through to extended passages stretching to multiple pages or more, which tend to expand somewhat on his more pithy

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<sup>18</sup> Tanner, Michael 'Nietzsche'. In *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Thomas, 339-435. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Page 384.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. Bernard Williams), *Nietzsche: The Gay Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Page xii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*



exclamations. In Part III of ‘Beyond Good and Evil’ (1886 – hereafter *BGE*), for example, he unleashes the following indictment:

...[Christianity] is rather that faith...which resembles in a terrible fashion a protracted suicide of reason – of a tough, long-lived, wormlike reason which is not to be killed instantaneously with a single blow. The Christian faith is from the beginning sacrifice: sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit, at the same time enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation. There is cruelty and religious Phoenicianism in this faith exacted of an over-ripe, manifold and much-indulged conscience: its presupposition is that the subjection of the spirit is indescribably *painful*, that the entire past and habitude of such a spirit resists the *absurdissimum* which ‘faith’ appears to it to be.<sup>22</sup>

Nietzsche’s basic argument is that Christianity has developed out of the desire for the subjugated masses to be somehow consoled as to their inferior position. It has glorified weakness, and has persuaded man that to be in a state of permanent deference to a higher authority is ideal (an apparent attempt to negate the ‘will-to-power – the driving force of life which Nietzsche identifies, in a furtherance and adaptation of Schopenhauer’s idea of the *Will* – in which man is willing to risk death in order to achieve some form of higher station, particularly over contemporaries):

What is objectionable about most forms of religion, on his view, is not their falsity per se but their detrimental impact upon human life. He argues that they tend to feed upon and foster weakness, sickness, life-weariness, resentment, and self-abnegation, poisoning the wellsprings of vitality and creativity in the process.<sup>23</sup>

It is perhaps worth reinforcing the idea that, contrary perhaps to the expectation one senses when reading a philosopher discussing ‘God’, the actual existence of Him is not a matter for concern in this context. Rather:

Nietzsche’s fundamental point about “the death of God” is that at this juncture all such recourses are on the wane, and that we are past the point at which we may hope and expect to come up with something comparably capable of filling the God-role. Whether this is the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning for humanity is the great question it poses, with the “advent of nihilism” as the all-too-natural withdrawal-symptom of this “event”.<sup>24</sup>

If the ‘Death of God’ has, for Nietzsche, prepared the way for a fatal lapse into nihilism by humanity, it is necessary that his next step might be to suggest some form

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. R.J. Hollingdale), *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 75.

<sup>23</sup> Schacht, Richard. ‘Friedrich Nietzsche’. In *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel, 390-411. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001. Page 396.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

of alternative method of understanding life. Crucially, this ‘alternative’ could not rely on the same transcendent nature as God had done for its existence; Nietzsche was concerned with suggesting a possibility which did not simply ‘fill God’s shoes’, as it were, but directed man’s thought toward *this* life, not the next. Consequently, this new idea did not recognise the separation of the body and soul after death; Nietzsche moved away, therefore, from ideas of asceticism – one of Schopenhauer’s more significant suggestions for coping with life.

The *Übermensch* is one part of this new hypothesis, and perhaps the better known. Observing the various translations of the word – as ‘superman’ or ‘overman’ – it soon becomes clear that this is a German word which does not receive justice when translated; it is perhaps best to keep it untranslated, and to allow all the various connotations of the word to intermingle. Posited in Nietzsche’s 1883 book ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra’ (hereafter *TSZ*), Nietzsche makes the following claim:

The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!

I entreat you, my brothers, *remain true to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes! They are poisoners, whether they know it or not.

They are despisers of life, atrophying and self-poisoned men, of whom the earth is weary: so let them be gone!<sup>25</sup>

This is a bold claim – not simply does the *Übermensch* give the earth meaning, but it *is* that meaning. In the second sentence, Nietzsche warns against being persuaded of the validity of ‘superterrestrial’ ideas (a typically thinly veiled reference to Christianity, primarily), succinctly positioning the *Übermensch* well within the realm of the *real*. A further implication of this warning is that the *Übermensch* should not be understood as a figure whose arrival is awaited, the prime example being Jesus in the Christian

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<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 42.

tradition, rather, as a goal for mankind – that each person, ultimately, would become an *Übermensch*.<sup>26</sup>

The idea of the *Übermensch* is closely related to that of ‘eternal recurrence’ – the theory posited towards the end of *TGS*:

*The heaviest weight* – What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now love it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!’ Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this again and innumerable times again?’ would lie on your action as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?<sup>27</sup>

This idea is further expounded in *TSZ*, in the section entitled ‘Of the Vision and the Riddle’, in which Zarathustra in conversation with his companion the dwarf (and using similar imagery to that found in *TGS*), states:

‘Behold this moment!’ I went on. ‘From this gateway Moment a long, eternal lane runs *back*: an eternity lies behind us.  
 ‘Must not all things that *can* run have already run along this lane? Must not all things that *can* happen *have* already happened, been done, run past?...  
 ‘And this slow spider that creeps along in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you at this gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things – must we not all have been here before?  
 ‘ – and must we not return and run down that other lane out before us, down that long, terrible land – must we not return eternally?’<sup>28</sup>

The thought of re-living every element of life, its joys and sorrows, in exactly the same way, for the rest of eternity is something which, Nietzsche claims, only a certain type of person could possibly tolerate. To tolerate the possibility is not the ideal state, Nietzsche goes on to argue, however – rather, it is a characteristic of the (not yet extant)

<sup>26</sup> This is an understanding that was comprehensively abused by the Nazi regime in particular, whose comprehension of the *Übermensch* was racially based, and consequently spawned the (un-Nietzschean) idea of inferior humans, to be controlled and subjugated.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. Bernard Williams), *Nietzsche: The Gay Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Page 194.

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 178/9.

*Übermensch* that it *embraces* the possibility, and in suggesting this, Nietzsche introduced the final concept in the group of related ideas:

My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it – all idealism is hypocrisy towards necessity –, but to love it...<sup>29</sup>

In short, Nietzsche here suggests that in order to achieve greatness, it is necessary to see all of life's experiences – both positive and, perhaps more importantly, negative – as fundamentally *good*, and to not wish them any different, either in the present, or in any recurrence – an idea he terms *amor fati*: love of fate. Of course, it is a dangerous game to use Nietzsche's comment in *Ecce Homo* to validate an argument posited in the – earlier – book *TSZ*, particularly as the idea of the *Übermensch* is notable by its absence in the above quotation. This is perhaps one of the reasons scholars disagree over when the concept of the *Übermensch* was a genuine Nietzschean philosophy, or simply a *possibility* put forward and never fully adopted.

Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the ideas of the *Übermensch*, *amor fati* and that of *eternal recurrence* form part of a trinity of ideas (terminology to which Nietzsche would surely object) which – in the true sense of trinity – are fully interdependent, and cannot be properly understood otherwise. Ultimately:

...if one were able to [affirm life] even if faced with that prospect [of eternal recurrence], then one would be past susceptibility to Schopenhauerian disillusionment and pessimism, and would have the resources required for the overcoming of nihilism. If one has the ability to live joyfully and affirmatively without any hope that life and the world will ever have a significantly different character – or even a different character at all – than they already do, one will have the qualities characteristic of that higher, postnihilistic humanity of which the “overman” stands as Nietzsche's symbol.<sup>30</sup>

Nietzsche's primary concern, therefore, was to suggest a way in which the nihilistic world-view which he believed to be the direct consequence of the decline in

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<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. 'Ecce Homo'. In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and other writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley & Judith Norman, 71-151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Page 99.

<sup>30</sup> Schacht, Richard. 'Friedrich Nietzsche'. In *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel, 390-411. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001. Page 403.

belief (in God) could be avoided, and, more so, could be replaced; not by something ‘other’, but by something of *this* life, which could nevertheless be viewed as aspirational. In positing the ideas discussed across the previous pages, he did not, it must (again) be emphasised, develop his own system of thinking. All are ideas, and ideas which he was not averse to adapting, developing and even rubbishing. Nevertheless, his life’s work profoundly influenced both later philosophy, and, most importantly for this thesis, artists and thinkers active during his lifetime.

### **Nietzsche & Wagner – A Precedential Relationship**

As has been previously mentioned in this chapter, Nietzsche’s engagement with music, in terms of his inspiration, criticism, and personal preference pure-and-simple is firmly grounded in a relationship with Richard Wagner – a relationship which it is essential to consider (particularly given its later reversal) in order to contextualise Mahler’s subsequent engagement with Nietzsche’s thought. Whilst the nature of this relationship changed profoundly and irrevocably, this change does not mean the relationship was any less important, and as such, a great deal of consideration of Nietzsche’s musical opinion is influenced by, or baldly based upon, his interaction with Wagner, both musically and personally (insofar as these two terms, in this context, can be separated). As Michael Tanner points out in the introduction to the Penguin edition of *BT*:

...given that [Nietzsche’s] primary concern was always with culture, its possibilities and catastrophes, it is not conceivable that he should have failed to be preoccupied with Wagner, even if he had never been a friend and intimate of his...[He] held unswervingly the view that the health of a culture was to be estimates in terms of the art it produced. So an encounter of some kind between him and the most spectacular artistic presence of the nineteenth century was inevitable.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Schacht, Richard. ‘Friedrich Nietzsche’. In *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel, 390-411. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001. Page xii.

Nietzsche and the Wagners (Cosima was Richard's mistress when Nietzsche first encountered them, but soon became his wife) had a profound friendship; Nietzsche's admiration for Wagner (whilst bordering on the sycophantic) was deeply held.

By the end of his productive life, however, his opinion of Wagner had practically reversed – 'In the summer of 1876, right in the middle of the first *Festspiel*, I took leave of Wagner. I cannot stand ambiguities: since coming to Germany, Wagner had ascended step by step to everything that I hate – even to anti-Semitism...Richard Wagner, seemingly the all-conquering, actually a decaying, despairing decadent, suddenly sank down helpless and shattered before the Christian cross...' <sup>32</sup>

This is an excellent example of Nietzsche's penchant for the adaptation, or even at times, repudiation of his own ideas - the nature of Nietzsche's productive life is such that ideas and theories that he suggests at one moment, he withdraws, adapts or negates the next. This is no less true for his thinking on the subject of art – perhaps, even, more so. As Philip Pothen points out in his book *Nietzsche and the Fate of Art*:

The huge and often overwhelming importance attached to *The Birth of Tragedy* in most readings of Nietzsche's thoughts on art can be seen to distort interpretations such that this text is too often seen to be entirely *representative* of Nietzsche's thought, or at any rate, to dominate interpretations such that later texts come to be overshadowed, ignored or, at the very worst, dismissed as irrelevant to Nietzsche's philosophy of art. <sup>33</sup>

*The Birth of Tragedy* is seen by many to be the book that contains Nietzsche's 'philosophy of art'. Typically Nietzschean, however, is the 'Attempt at a Self-criticism' that prefaces later editions of the work, in which the author takes issue with his younger self, and seeks to temper his earlier enthusiasm for the ideas contained within:

...today I find it an impossible book – badly written, clumsy and embarrassing, its images frenzied and confused, sentimental, in some places saccharine-sweet to the point of effeminacy, uneven in pace, lacking in any desire for logical purity, so sure of its convictions that it is above any need for proof, a book for initiates, 'music' for

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<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. 'Nietzsche contra Wagner: From the Files of a Psychologist'. In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and other writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley & Judith Norman, 265-282. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Page 276.

<sup>33</sup> Pothen, Philip, *Nietzsche and the Fate of Art*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002. Page 3.

those who have been baptized in the name of music and who are related from the first by their common and rare experiences of art, a shibboleth for first cousins *in artibus* – an arrogant and fanatical book that wished from the start to exclude the *profanum vulgus* of the ‘educated’ even more than the ‘people’ ...<sup>34</sup>

This self-criticism is somewhat similar in its ferocity to the criticism directed at the book upon its publication by established scholars, and it is tempting to read the *Self-criticism* as a warning to not take the contents of the book too seriously. But of course, if the author felt strongly enough that the contents of his book were not an important part of his life’s output, he would not have had it republished, preface or no preface; as such, the *Self-criticism* should be read and considered, just as the whole work should be approached on its own terms, with an awareness of its unique status within Nietzsche’s oeuvre. As Michael Tanner points out:

...what makes *BT* the indispensable start to Nietzsche’s writing career, for those who want to understand the underlying unity of his concerns, is the manner in which he begins with a set of issues which seem to be remote from the present time, but gradually reveals that his underlying concern is with culture, its perennial conditions, and the enemies of their fulfilment.<sup>35</sup>

Whereas figures such as Kant and Schopenhauer exercised significant influence upon the creative artists of Mahler’s time in the usual manner of historical figures (study of their thinking &c), as Carl Niekerk points out:

To understand the importance of Nietzsche for Mahler and many of his contemporaries, it is crucial to realise that Nietzsche was seen not as just another figure in the history of Western philosophy but rather as someone who personified an endpoint and also the chance for a new beginning.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, of course, Nietzsche was alive, and as such, his influence on those artists was one which evolved from both perspectives; most significantly, and as discussed earlier, as a result of his developmental style of philosophy. These ‘developments’ in his thinking are perhaps best exemplified in his relationship with Wagner, which completely reversed, becoming decidedly frosty towards the end of his life. Whilst Wagner,

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<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. ‘The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music’. In *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson & Duncan Large, 42-87. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006. Page 5.

<sup>35</sup> Tanner, Michael ‘Nietzsche’. In *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Thomas, 339-435. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Page 352.

<sup>36</sup> Niekerk, Carl, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 83.

however, undoubtedly influenced Nietzsche, both positively and negatively, there was no such relationship with Mahler – Mahler read Nietzsche, but did not personally engage him.

The extent to which Mahler was influenced by Nietzsche is perhaps the key question, and a question which has divided opinion amongst musicologists and historians. The most strikingly obvious example of such an influence is to be found in one of the programmatic titles of the Third Symphony – ‘The Gay Science’. Just the mention of this title is enough to conjure up all sorts of associations, mostly stemming back to Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God. This does not stop many scholars, however, from suggesting that the Third Symphony, rather like the same individuals will often claim of the *Second*, culminates ‘Christianly’ – ‘The conclusion of the movement suggests Mahler’s conviction that the striving will can finally find peace and salvation in reunion with God.’<sup>37</sup> The author of this comment is William McGrath, whose book *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria* dissects the *Third Symphony*, ultimately suggesting an hybridised reading of the work which combines an awareness of Nietzsche’s significant influence on Mahler in the writing of the symphony, with an emphasis on a quasi-Christian interpretation of the role of the composer. McGrath’s comment that ‘Since it was in the *Third Symphony* that Mahler first achieved and fully expressed a clear vision of a higher spiritual reality...’ serves to illuminate the assumption behind his thinking. His description of Mahler’s vision as ‘clear’ is somewhat bizarre, given some of his later pronouncements on the difficulty of attributing a concrete *meaning* to the work. Carl Niekerk, on the other hand, in his book *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, is strikingly bold in his assertion that:

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<sup>37</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 147.



...Mahler did not simply borrow a few ideas or images from Nietzsche, but rather...the worldview underlying the Second, Third, and Fourth Symphonies is fundamentally Nietzschean.<sup>38</sup>

The nature of Mahler's 'Nietzscheanism', however, must be considered in the context of the intellectual terrain of his day:

Many of Nietzsche's ideas discussed here are constitutive elements for Mahler's music making. And yet Mahler is not a dogmatic "Nietzschean" thinker. When discussing the impact of Nietzsche and Wagner on fin-de-siècle Viennese culture, it is important to realise that Nietzsche and Wagner were still alive when Mahler and Lipiner became interested in their works as members of the *Pernerstorfer Kreis* in the late 1870s. A serious literary reception of Nietzsche's thinking, however, did not start until the early 1890s, when Nietzsche became the object of a cult-like following.<sup>39</sup>

Mahler's 'Nietzschean worldview', then, is perhaps a different kind of 'Nietzschean' to that which would be recognised today, but certainly more interesting for it; Mahler appreciated Nietzsche first-hand, as it were, rather than through the prism of criticism.

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<sup>38</sup> Niekerk, Carl, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 83/4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid* at 86.

## Chapter Two: Movements 2 & 3 – A Natural Portrait?

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This chapter deals with those two movements which form both the beginning of the generally accepted ‘Part Two’ of the Third Symphony, as well as this thesis’ proposed ‘second group’. The second movement – the *Minuet* – was the first part of the whole symphony to be composed, and as such, deserves to be considered in some depth. It is also, however, the movement that has experienced the most misinterpretation, and a considerable section of the first half of this chapter is given over to assessing the reasons for that misinterpretation. Once the nature and significance of this misinterpretation have been discussed, the chapter moves on to a consideration of the movement on its own terms, and looks particularly closely at those structural features which are, the argument here present suggests, the method by which Mahler infused this movement with a subversive subtext.

The second half of the chapter deals with the third movement – the *Scherzo*. Once again, the emphasis is primarily structural, and deals first with the opening section, which is a transcription of a previously composed setting of a *Wunderhorn* poem entitled *Ablösung im Sommer*. This opening section is dealt with in depth, with particular consideration being given to the importance of the original text of the poem, considering Mahler’s choice not to explicitly state it. The most infamous section(s) of this movement is the posthorn solo, the meaning of which is considered both in isolation, but, more importantly, within the context of the overwhelming structure of the movement. This chapter regards the second and third movements of the Third Symphony as representative of some of Mahler’s most subtle writing, but argues that they begin to introduce the notion that the hierarchical structure of the symphony is

fundamentally a flawed one; utilised by Mahler to throw into relief the unfolding Nietzschean narrative of the symphony.

### **Movement Two: *Minuet***

I regard my three big symphonies as my major works: the first two have been performed several times, but the last (3<sup>rd</sup>) only in part – this part (the ‘Flower’ piece) having ‘got going’.<sup>1</sup>

This ‘‘Flower’ piece’ to which Mahler refers in the above letter to Richard Batke, dated 1896, is the Second Movement of the Third Symphony. The first movement of the symphony to be composed, it is perhaps the movement which can be said to most directly ‘represent’ something; that ‘something’ being the meadows surrounding his composition-hut on the edge of the Attersee; Mahler finished the draft for this movement in one sitting in the summer of 1895, and later said of it:

Anybody who doesn’t actually know the place [the shores of the Attersee: where Mahler’s hut was situated]...will practically be able to visualise it from the music, so unique is its charm, as if made just to provide the inspiration for a piece such as this.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst, at roughly ten minutes duration, it is only the third-shortest movement of the symphony, its ‘style’ is that of a miniature; a feature which, in association with its (seemingly) light-hearted nature, doubtless contributed to its early popularity as a ‘stand-alone’ work. The quotation which opens this chapter is an excerpt from a longer passage of the letter, in which Mahler outlines to Batke his mixed emotions regarding what he sees as a ‘compromise’ in which he accepts being comprehensively misunderstood in return for ‘a hearing’:

This last [the ‘‘Flower’ piece’] is now in demand among conductors at most concert establishments, a fact for which I doubtless have to thank the good ‘notices’, something with which I had not hitherto been overwhelmed. The that this short piece (more an intermezzo), torn as it is out of the context of the larger work, my most important and large-scale so far, is bound to give rise to misunderstanding cannot prevent me from allowing it to be performed separately. I simply have no choice. If I am at long last to get a hearing I must not be finicky,

<sup>1</sup> GM to RB: Mahler, Alma (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 197.

<sup>2</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 53.

and so this modest little piece needs must often this season 'lie bleeding at Pompey's feet', introducing me to the public as a 'meditative', finespun 'singer of Nature.'<sup>3</sup>

In effect, Mahler is sacrificing the integrity of the movement in order to curry favour with the listening public, accepting that, even if they do eventually hear the second movement in context, they will still misunderstand it. Regrettably for Mahler, the second movement of the Third Symphony has never really recovered from its use as groundbait, and, whilst the nature of its misinterpretation has changed, the outcome has not. Indeed, Peter Franklin points out that '[The listening audience] surprised both [Mahler] and themselves by finding it wholly unshocking and charming.'<sup>4</sup> – this movement coming in the wake of the rather larger-scale Second Symphony. Mahler's fear that he would be regarded by the public as a '... 'meditative', finespun 'singer of Nature.''' would appear, at first glance, to be somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy, given his (private) comments on the movement:

You can't imagine how it well sounds! It is the most carefree thing I have ever written – as carefree as only flowers are. It all sways and waves in the air, as light and graceful as can be, like the flowers bending on their stems in the wind...<sup>5</sup>

Crucially, however, he continues:

As you might image, the mood doesn't remain one of innocent, flower-like serenity, but suddenly becomes serious and oppressive. A stormy wind blows across the meadow and shakes the leaves and blossoms, which groan and whimper on their stems, as if imploring release into a higher realm...<sup>6</sup>

This is an important statement, for in it, Mahler accepts that there are elements of 'innocent, flower-like serenity', but draws specific attention to the contrasting aspect of the movement – an aspect which has been steadfastly under-appreciated, and which is the key to understanding the significance of this movement.

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<sup>3</sup> GM to RB: Mahler, Alma (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 197.

<sup>4</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 54.

<sup>5</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 53.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Jens Malte Fischer, in a comment that does the second movement a considerable disservice, suggests:

The overriding feeling is of a graceful exercise in style, a certain Biedermeier elegance that is already neo-Biedermeier and, as such, comparable to the neo-Rococo tone of the poems of Otto Julius Bierbaum, which Mahler did not, however, like. The middle section almost literally shimmers, suggesting the wind blowing over the grass.<sup>7</sup>

This is a somewhat antediluvian view for a contemporary Mahler scholar to take, as it accurately epitomises the opinion of those audiences who heard the second movement out of context immediately following the symphony's completion. In saying that the 'overriding feeling' is that of an 'exercise in style', Fischer betrays a fundamental lack of understanding of the movement as a whole, a suggestion which is reinforced by his naïveté in assuming that a comment such as 'The middle section almost literally shimmers, suggesting the wind blowing over the grass' can be made without any further exploration of the symbolism of that wind.

A word frequently used to describe this movement is 'Pastoral' – indeed, at times during its development, the symphony as a whole may have been described thus, particularly by those whose prime (or only) exposure to it was the *Minuet*. Undoubtedly, a significant amount of the misunderstanding which originally beset this movement was derived from its decontextualisation; that is, out of the context of the larger symphony, some of the 'meaning' was unavoidably lost – a possibility, as has been shown, which Mahler was well aware of. However, in finding the movement 'unshocking', the listening public were ignoring the 'signs', as it were, of the depth of the work – signs which, whilst vague when the movement is considered independently, become explicit when it is recontextualised.

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<sup>7</sup> Fischer, Jens Malte (trans. Stewart Spencer), *Gustav Mahler*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Page 277/8.

### **Structural Opposition**

The idea of contrasting moods – the ‘carefree’, ‘swaying’ opening becoming, as Mahler described it, ‘serious and oppressive’, before a conclusion evoking the ‘mood’ of the opening – is the foundation upon which the entire movement is built. The movement is referred to by Mahler as a ‘Minuet’; terminology which has specific implications for the overarching structure of the work. Typically, however, those structural prerequisites are found only significantly adapted. Broadly speaking, the structure follows the pattern A-B-A-B-A, a form perhaps more closely associated with the development of the Minuet-and-Trio form into that of the Scherzo movement utilised by 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-Century symphonists (it is to be noted, of course, that the following movement in the Third Symphony is defined as a Scherzo). Whilst one would expect the ‘B’ (or ‘Trio’) section to consist of relatively relaxed material, noticeably lightly scored, which would serve as a contrast to the faster, more energetic material of the ‘A’ (or ‘Minuet’) section, quite the reverse is true. As Peter Franklin puts it:

...the minuet material has the character of a relaxed and contrasting ‘trio’ to the proto-scherzo material [that found in the ‘B’ section], but is nonetheless given formal precedence as the primary mode of the movement.<sup>8</sup>

This has two consequences. The first is that there ‘...results...another version of the Mahlerian structure that deliberately threatens its own stability’<sup>9</sup> through which Mahler counters the surface image of relative peace and contentment. The second, intricately connected to this sense of instability, is that on a practical level, a faster, more elaborate ‘B’ section better serves the purpose of evoking a challenge to stability – in this case, in the form of wind. In reversing the conventional roles of the ‘A’ and ‘B’ sections, Mahler allows himself to conclude the movement in the same relaxed manner with which he began it, whilst simultaneously suggesting that it is not a self-contained entity.

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<sup>8</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 54.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Through the use of what would conventionally be understood as a ‘B’ section to conclude the movement, Mahler is pointing towards the next movement, as if to say that the Minuet can only be understood fully in the context of the subsequent movement. Indeed, Franklin identifies the penultimate four bars (which he refers to as a ‘ravishingly Tristanesque elaboration’<sup>10</sup> – see Ex. 1) as a surface-level example of the sense of longing for ‘release into a higher realm’ which Mahler refers to in his description of the movement<sup>11</sup>, through its prolongation of the dominant.

Ex. 1

These four bars are an example of the aural ‘reminders’ which Mahler occasionally utilises in this movement; subtle enough, yet sufficiently obvious to remind the listener that all is not quite as it seems. Indeed, even at the very beginning of the movement, Mahler does a similar thing: at Fig.1, the music slips into the relative minor – F<sup>#</sup> minor – and the orchestration becomes sparse, with a definite emphasis on the upper registers

<sup>10</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 54.

<sup>11</sup> See p.29 above

of the violin and flute (see Ex. 2). This sinuous soundworld, and the flowing nature of the violin line which forms part of it, is a suggestion of the chill wind that blows in at the start of the 'B' section proper.



Ex. 2

These subtle 'reminders', as evidenced by that discussed immediately above, are achieved primarily through imaginative harmonic language and orchestration – characteristics which precluded comprehension by all but the most attuned listeners at the time of the movement's first performances. Michael Kennedy suggests, however, that contemporary listeners have an additional layer of confusion:

But the kaleidoscopic effect of the orchestration is sufficient in itself for most ears; Mahler can scarcely be blamed if his turns of phrase have become clichés for a later generation because of the uses to which they were put by the émigré musicians who, knowing their Mahler better than most at the time, drew so heavily on him for Hollywood film scores in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>12</sup>

If the listener can, however, at once cut through the contemporary cultural connotations which Mahler's music now evokes, and, once this is done, recognise that the movement is not a stand-alone miniature, but relates specifically to the movement following it, then they can fully appreciate the importance of what is, by Mahler's own admission,

<sup>12</sup> Kennedy, Michael. *The Dent Master Musicians: Mahler*, London: J.M. Dent, 1993. Page 126.



the ‘...smallest and most “inarticulate”’<sup>13</sup> of the movements in the Third Symphony – a movement which can only be fully appreciated in the context of the remaining movements of the symphony’s original ‘Part II’.

### **Movement Three: *Scherzo***

The *Scherzo* in particular, the animal piece, is at once the most scurrilous and most tragic that ever was – in the way that music alone can mystically take us from one extreme to the other in the twinkling of an eye. In this piece it is as if Nature herself were pulling faces and putting out her tongue. There is such a gruesome, Panic humour in it that one is more likely to be overcome by horror than laughter.<sup>14</sup>

If the *Minuet* of Mahler’s Third Symphony gave the impression of being somewhat atypical of Mahler’s output more generally, then the *Scherzo*, at roughly sixteen minutes long, represents a homecoming of sorts. Whilst its comparative length might be the most obvious difference, more important is its content, and Mahler’s presentation of it. In the *Minuet*, as has been discussed at length above, the sense of ‘opposition’ and ‘instability’ inherent in the movement is subtly articulated – so much so that an overly simplistic reading of the movement as a somewhat twee programmatic miniature is common. In the *Scherzo*, it is impossible to miss the sense of opposition, but equally impossible to fail to recognise that the moments at which this opposition is most apparent are signifiers of something much more profound. Opportunities to identify ‘overt’ references to Nietzsche (such as that in the fourth movement – the setting of Nietzsche’s text) are relatively sparse within this movement, just as in the last. This does not, however, mean that Mahler has moved away from Nietzsche; rather, it is necessary to appreciate these two movements as fulfilling a crucial role within the hierarchical structure which Mahler mocks – hinting at times at their own inadequacy, but primarily existing as a ‘false alternative’.

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in: ‘de La Grange, Henry-Louis, *Mahler: Volume One*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1976. Page 386.’

<sup>14</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 129.

**Ablösung im Sommer – A Song Without Words; the Opening**

The first ‘section’ of the movement (bb.1-67), however, is strongly reminiscent of the pastoral (and highly programmatic) nature of the *Minuet*; the score is awash with bird-calls, and the forces employed by Mahler are similarly conservative. The significance of this section, which seems almost to stand alone, is only to be appreciated when one notes that it is an orchestral arrangement of a previously composed *Wunderhorn* song: *Ablösung im Sommer*. Translated (less-than-poetically) as ‘Replacement in Summer’ (Franklin prefers ‘Change-over in Summer’, but the term ‘Replacement’ is perhaps more apt, as will become clear), it tells the story of the death of the Cuckoo and its implications:

Cuckoo has fallen to its death,  
 Fallen to its death on a green willow!  
 Willow! Willow!  
 Cuckoo is dead! Cuckoo is dead!  
 Has fallen to its death!  
 Who then shall all summer long  
 Beguile the time for us?  
 Cuckoo! Cuckoo!  
 Oh, let it be Madame Nightingale!  
 She sits on a green branch!  
 The little, fine nightingale!  
 She sings and springs, is always gay.  
 When other birds are silent!  
 We wait for Madame Nightingale,  
 She lives in the green glen,  
 And when the cuckoo’s call has stopped,  
 Then she begins to sing!<sup>15</sup>

Of course, the first significant issue raised by this is the validity of considering the text in relation to the movement, given it does not appear anywhere in the score. Furthermore, Mahler had demonstrated in his Second Symphony, and would go on to do so again in the Third, that he was happy to use the human voice when appropriate; a consequence of which being that the *absence* of a voice where one could appropriately have been utilised raises significant issues. The key to this is to be found in a consideration of the hierarchical nature of the symphony as a whole. This movement, it must be remembered, is entitled “What the Animals in the Forest Tell Me’, and is

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<sup>15</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 59.

placed between a movement ‘about’ flowers, and a movement which ostensibly introduces mankind to the Chain of Being, and does so through the use of the human voice. As such, Mahler could not have utilised a human voice in the third movement, as to do so would have been to diminish the significance of its introduction in the fourth. However, Mahler quite obviously felt that the sentiment of *Ablösung im Sommer* was vital to the *Scherzo*, and therefore chose to arrange it instrumentally so as there was absolutely no doubt of its origins, imploring the listener to consider the text of the poem, but without ruining the hierarchical structure of the symphony as a whole.

The poem, as Franklin claims, ‘...seems surprisingly devoid of symbolic potential’<sup>16</sup>, but it is his term ‘seems’ that is the crucial one. For whilst its natural symbolism is its most obvious characteristic, the poem is actually shot through with tragedy, but also a distinct flavour of unpleasantness. The tragedy is obviously manifested in the death of the cuckoo, but the poem dedicates little time to mourning its loss. Indeed, even the period of mourning it does allow itself is contrived:

The cuckoo’s fate inspires a grotesque little minor-key dance with a dry, wry vocal line, whose caricatured weeping on the thrice repeated word ‘willow’ suggests that the singer’s sad face is ironically painted on, like a clown’s.<sup>17</sup>

To take this idea of contrivance a little further, it is helpful to consider the importance of the ‘willow’. The original German is ‘*Weiden*’, which does indeed translate as ‘willow’, but a separate meaning of the word is related to the idea of gloating, particularly over someone else’s misfortune. For the Cuckoo to die ‘on a green willow’ is unfortunate, but when this play on words is taken into account, the poem takes on a rather more unpleasant complexion. This unpleasantness is then compounded, as the music continues in the same unhappy fashion, whilst the text shifts the reason for such unhappiness from the Cuckoo’s death, to a more self-interested mentality: ‘Who then shall all summer long/Beguile the time for us?’ Soon, all memory of the Cuckoo is

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<sup>16</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 59.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid* at 61.

erased, and the poem's attention has turned wholeheartedly towards the Nightingale. The accompaniment reflects this; having been in C minor, it changes key, into the tonic major, and serenely accompanies discussion of Nightingale. It continues in this vein until the very end, when the 'Cuckoo melody' returns, the mood of the piece reverts to that of the opening, and the poem peters out, as if suddenly aware of its own moral failing. This is followed by a surprisingly vigorous restatement of the material from Fig.1, before, in the original *Wunderhorn* version there is a *ff* chord drawing the song to a close, and in the orchestrated version there is a brief transitional period which serves much the same purpose – that is, to remind the listener of the 'gruesome, Panic humour' which Mahler promised.

It is clear, therefore, that the role of the opening 67 bars of this movement is complex. The musical setting implies the meaning of the text, which certainly ought to be regarded as crucial to the overall meaning of the movement, whilst avoiding the use of a human voice. Furthermore, Mahler's treatment of the accompaniment:

...seems deliberately to soften and even prettify it: heightening its 'scherzando' charm and turning it into an apparently cohesive musical paragraph describing rather friendly animals prodding, rustling and fluttering through the forest twilight with nothing much in mind.<sup>18</sup>

Franklin goes on to use the term 'anthropomorphized' to describe the appearance of these animals, a term which immediately evokes Adorno's comment about the original seventh movement – that Mahler '...paints paradise in rustic anthropomorphous colors to give notice that it does not exist.'<sup>19</sup> Indeed, a similar thing is happening here; Mahler, through presenting a clichéd vision of the animals of the forest is simultaneously mocking that vision. The opening of the third movement, therefore, presents a scene which is, on the surface of it, relatively innocuous. It is when one appreciates that innocuous-sounding music for Mahler invariably signals the opposite, and when one

<sup>18</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 61.

<sup>19</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. (trans. Edmund Jephcott). *Mahler: A Music Physiognomy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Page 56/7.

considers the music in the light of the text it was originally intended to accompany, that one begins to comprehend the depths of this movement.

### **‘Animal’ Music & the Infamous Posthorn**

Appreciated thus, the opening 67 bars are almost a separate entity, in which Mahler’s ‘sets-the-scene’, instructing the listener as to how what follows is to be appreciated. What follows is, of course, the main body of the movement, complete with the feature which has perhaps precipitated the most scholarly discussion: the posthorn solo. Before the posthorn solo arrives (it is best appreciated as a ‘B’ section), there is a significant passage of music which ostensibly explores the movement’s base idea – that of animals. Mahler, however, does this in such a way as to emphasise the ‘dark’ aspects of the movement; this passage in particular hints at a certain loss of innocence. Indeed, Thomas Peattie, in an article discussing what he perceives as Mahler’s ‘broken pastoral’, suggests that it is through Mahler’s subversion of an extant musical language upon which the idea of the pastoral is based that he conveys this sense of foreboding: ‘...by undermining a musical *topos* that had remained for centuries relatively stable he offers a critique of the pastoral’s supposed innocence.’<sup>20</sup> His prime basis for this claim is the somewhat detached nature of the posthorn solos, but the ‘critique of innocence’ begins much earlier than that, with rambunctiously sinister screeching bird-calls, a quotation of the cuckoo’s thematic material from the very opening, and decidedly aggressive scoring for brass. This section is perhaps the most explicit yet in articulating the idea that, as Franklin puts it:

...the forest was the place where the Romantic poet typically experienced the mysterious duality of the world in sharpest definition: where the Black Hunter lurked unseen behind an idyllic tableau of animals scurrying beneath slanting sunbeams, to the sound of far-off hunting horns; the green depths where by night the

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<sup>20</sup> Peattie, Thomas. ‘In Search of Lost Time: Memory and Mahler’s Broken Pastoral’. In *Mahler and His World*, ed. Karen Painter, 185-198. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. Page 186.

beating hooves of Goethe's Erlkönig echoed amidst the screeches of nocturnal predators.<sup>21</sup>

However, such compositional techniques only give the listener a *sense* of the 'broken' nature of the pastoral. For it to truly be realised, one must look at the role of the posthorn solo specifically.

On the surface of it, the posthorn solos are oases of calm in an otherwise somewhat agitated movement. Offering a complete contrast to the material which both precedes and succeeds them, they are the feature of the third movement which provoke the most thought, and, indeed, the most disagreement. The beginning of the first solo (at Fig.14) is not a complete shock, however, for Mahler significantly scales down the instrumentation and begins to phase out the overt 'animal' material a considerable way in advance of the posthorn's entry. Furthermore, he introduces a military-style trumpet call, marked to be played *mit Dämpfer*, which skilfully takes its inspiration from the oppressive triplet material of the previous fourteen bars, and, through continuing in 6/8 against the prevailing 2/4, transfigures that material, at once adjusting the 'mood' of the movement in preparation for posthorn solo to come, whilst also, in the most subtle way imaginable, introducing the shadow of *man* into the movement. (See Ex. 3)

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<sup>21</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 42.

Ex. 2

The entrance of the posthorn is emphasised by a shift into F major (as can be seen in Ex. 2 above) and there follows a passage (Fig.14-15) in which the posthorn has all the melodic and rhythmic interest, supported only by the first violins sustaining a chordal accompaniment. Mahler here effectively creates a definite sense of detachment, both in a structural sense – the posthorn sections, despite the brief transitional passages as discussed above, clearly function at one remove from the other – ‘A’ – sections – but also in a more mystical sense, as the lilting melody and comparatively static harmonic language hint at a degree of other-worldliness. As Peattie suggests, ‘Its radical sense of suspension and the stylized character of the posthorn itself impart a degree of

unreality.<sup>22</sup> This 'degree of unreality' is accentuated by the instruction 'as if from the far distance', which is to be found at the posthorn's entry<sup>23</sup>; the level to which this has been interpreted literally has varied, with modern performance practice seeming to favour the player being situated off-stage at least – often some considerable distance away.

It is beyond doubt that the posthorn sections of the third movement were inspired by a poem entitled *Der Postillion* by Nikolaus Lenau<sup>24</sup>, which deals with a journey by post-coach through the countryside. It is a lengthy poem, and as such, reproduced here are just the verses which are most relevant:

In the midst of May's delight  
Was a churchyard lying,  
That a wanderer's cursory glance  
Stopped for serious contemplation.

Leaning against the mountain's rim  
Was a pale grey wall,  
And God's crucifixion effigy  
Stood high in silent sorrow.

Coachman driving along his path  
More tacit now and weary;  
Brings his horses to a halt,  
Staring at the cross up there.

'Steed and wheel must here stand still,  
Should you be kept safe from harm,  
My comrade's lying over there  
Deep under the cool earth!

And such appealing a fellow he was!  
Lord, it's a thousand pities!  
No one blew the horn so fast,  
Fast as my comrade did!

Here I always have to halt,  
To him, lying there under greensward,  
Blow in faithful brotherhood  
His favourite song.'

And to the graveyard now he sent  
Happy wanderer's tunes,

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<sup>22</sup> Peattie, Thomas. 'In Search of Lost Time: Memory and Mahler's Broken Pastoral'. In *Mahler and His World*, ed. Karen Painter, 185-198. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. Page 189.

<sup>23</sup> In the score used in this thesis, the instruction runs only to 'Wie aus...'; one assumes an editorial error has obscured the rest of the phrase.

<sup>24</sup> Mahler reacted in amazement to a correspondent's suggestion to this effect, and had annotated the score with the words '*Der Postillion*'.



Should like to sound them through the deathly silence  
To his brother's final place of rest.

And the bright tone of his horn  
Resounded from the hills,  
As if the deceased postillion  
Had joined in to his songs.

Through field and grove again I went  
Charging at full gallop forward;  
In my ears for a long time stayed  
That sound from the hills.<sup>25</sup>

Rather than the living *postillion*'s horn itself, then, the horn in the third movement is perhaps better appreciated as the 'resounding' horn, which, the poet suggests, is 'As if the deceased postillion/Had joined in to his songs.'

Theodor Adorno regards the posthorn passages as 'banal' – a musical quotation which is adapted so as to be acceptable within the context of Mahler's symphony, representing, as Peter Franklin puts it, a(n unrealistic) 'world of untroubled beauty.'<sup>26</sup>

This is a much-disputed comment; Vladimír Karbusický suggests that:

Adorno had little understanding of the specificity of music outside Germany. He completely derided the Finn Jean Sibelius. Mahler's Czech-Bohemian roots were therefore entirely alien to him. Reference to this *ethnos* appears only once in his extensive book, when he links Mahler and Sigmund Freud: both were 'German-Bohemian Jews'. Adorno found the sense of reminiscence in the posthorn episode of the Third Symphony – which is coloured with distinctly Czech melodic formulae – merely 'scandalously audacious'.<sup>27</sup>

This 'sense of reminiscence' which Karbusický mentions is an important concept, and one which will be considered in a more in-depth discussion of the posthorn episode's importance.

At its most basic level, and in the vaguest language, most will agree that the posthorn in some way is representative of something 'other' than the immediacy of the forest, as evoked in the rest of the movement. What this 'other' actually *is*, is the point at which theories diverge; the answer is, of course, not straightforward. Lenau's poem is an important source of information, but one must consider the extent to which Mahler

<sup>25</sup> An excerpt from *Der Postillion* by Nikolaus Lenau, trans. Sissy von Kotzeue. Taken from <http://www.mvdaily.com/articles/2004/07/posthorn3.htm> Accessed 27.7.2012.

<sup>26</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 63.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.mvdaily.com/articles/2004/07/posthorn3.htm> Accessed 27.7.2012.

intended the poetic inspiration to be read literally – a question to which there is no clear answer.

Raymond Knapp points out that:

...in the Third Symphony, both scherzo and trio are presented sympathetically, in delicately balanced opposition, so that, while the center of awareness (the scherzo) will eventually protest violently against the intruding presence of the alien “other” (the posthorn trio), the latter lays claim to our long-term sympathies.<sup>28</sup>

That, as Knapp suggests, the posthorn episodes ‘[lay] claim to our long-term sympathies’ perhaps offers the clearest clue about the nature of those episodes. The listening audience sympathises with these sections most because they are, in a way, about them. Man recognises the influence of man in a movement about animals, and immediately sides with that influence. Mahler paints a musical picture in which the animal sections are the ‘natural’ state of things, and are frequently disconcerting at that, whereas the posthorn are cast peacefully, calmly, attractively – and function as a point of reference for the listener, who until now has felt distinctly out-of-place. To risk stretching the metaphor rather too far, it is as if the posthorn represents the backlit window of a forest house, glimpsed by a lost wanderer as the forest becomes dusky and the dangers of night loom large.

However welcome the sight of such a house, however, fundamentally it is not ‘of’ the forest. Rather, it is, and always will be, foreign, and as such, a source of suspicion and potential danger. This would account for the distinct sense of separate- or, ‘other’-ness which Mahler builds into the movement; whilst there are brief transitional sections, they cannot disguise the fact that the posthorn call is, ultimately, alien from the music of the animals.

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<sup>28</sup> Knapp, Raymond. *Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in Mahler's Re-Cycled Songs*, Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Page 132.

Peter Revers points out that, whilst the ‘other’-ness of the posthorn call ‘...timbrally [articulates] an apparent distant idyll’<sup>29</sup>, it does so:

...in the tone of the instrument itself whose connotations of promised but deceptive idyll are specifically adopted by Mahler from earlier works such as ‘Die Post’ from Schubert’s *Winterreise*.<sup>30</sup>

Revers is arguing that the posthorn calls articulate a deception – that the idyll which they evoke does not exist. This is a dramatic assertion, but one which is true only to an extent. The ‘idyll’ is not in some ‘other’ place. Certainly, it is ‘other’, but other only from the natural state of the forest, not geographically ‘other’ – it is not some distant land. Furthermore, ‘idyll’ is not a fully appropriate word to describe this ‘other’-ness – following the argument made some paragraphs previously, it is perhaps better described as an oasis, being surrounded on all sides by the oppressive forest (the ‘A’ sections). The metaphor soon breaks down, however, as the ‘oasis’ represented by the posthorn calls is regarded as such only by man – the animals view it as quite the reverse: a source of danger – a threat to their existence.

The posthorn, therefore, represents for man a reassurance that this forest is not a place untouched by humankind; one immediately thinks back to the very opening, where Mahler’s anthropomorphised animals exist to hint at the coming – or even already present – disquiet. For the animals to find the presence of man in the forest decidedly undesirable is entirely appropriate; the influence of man is pervasive, and by no means limited to the posthorn oases – rather, it can be felt strongly in the ‘animal’ sections, as well through the explicit reference of the posthorn.

Whilst the posthorn material forms the ‘B’ section of the overall structure of this movement, and, as Raymond Knapp is quoted as saying some pages earlier, ‘lays claim

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<sup>29</sup> Revers, Peter (trans. Jeremy Barham). ‘Song and song-symphony (I). *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and the Second, Third and Fourth Symphonies: music of heaven and earth’. In *The Cambridge Companion to Mahler*, ed. Jeremy Barham, 89-107. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Page 99.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

to our long-term sympathies<sup>31</sup>, it is possible to go further than that and argue that, rather than interpreting the structure linearly, a more appropriate interpretation is to suggest that the posthorn episodes act as an overarching influence. Peter Franklin asks:

...is it not rather a question of the posthorn colonizing and monopolizing the movement in these episodes and turning the animals' nocturnal forest into a humanly perceived idyll and elegy?<sup>32</sup>

- to which the answer is: 'yes', but further than that, the influence of the posthorn can be felt throughout the movement, not just where it is audible.

In broad language, then, the posthorn episodes in the third movement articulate the tension between man and animal, and explore the reactions to that tension in a predominantly animal environment. The music which follows the 'B' sections is clearly affected by them – after the first posthorn episode, the music strongly evokes the animals' nervousness; the second time, their sheer panic.

Peter Franklin argues that the reason for this panic on behalf of the animals is derived from the Schopenhauerean assertion that animals live only for the present, with no concept of past, or – more importantly – future, with the sense of mortality which that awareness brings:

...the consciousness of animals is a mere succession of present events, none of which, however, exists as future before its appearance, or as past after its disappearance, this being the distinctive characteristic of human consciousness. Therefore the animals have infinitely less to *suffer* than have we, since they know no other sufferings than those directly bought about by the *present*.<sup>33</sup>

He continues, suggesting that:

In general, animals play always with their cards on the table, so to speak; we therefore contemplate with so much pleasure their behaviour towards one another, not only when they belong to the same species, but also when they are of different species. It is characterized by a certain stamp of innocence, in contrast to the conduct of human beings, which is withdrawn from the innocence of nature by the first appearance of the faculty of reason, and therewith by prudence or deliberation.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Knapp, Raymond. *Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in Mahler's Re-Cycled Songs*, Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Page 132.

<sup>32</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 64.

<sup>33</sup> Schopenhauer, Arthur (trans. E.F.J.Payne). *The World as Will and Representation – Vol. II*, New York: Dover Publications, 1969. Page 60.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

Read like this, it becomes clear that, despite the superficially attractive nature of the posthorn melody, it represents for the animals a human interpretation of life, at odds with their own interpretation in which death plays no part. Raymond Knapp takes a step further, and suggests that :

...two horns join the posthorn during its second solo, supporting it with a warm lyricism; unmistakably, in line with longstanding Germanic associations with the horn, this is the sound of the *Waldhorn*, the eternal spirit of the forest, which enters to make an affirming, comforting connection to the posthorn and, by extension, to man.<sup>35</sup>

Even more worryingly for the animals, therefore, the ‘spirit’ of the forest (bearing in mind the forest’s important role in German romanticism) seems to have accepted the alien, and as such, the animals are no longer at the top of the forest hierarchy. Knapp goes on:

What ultimately panics the forest’s inhabitants is not the mere presence of an intruder, but rather his ability to disenfranchise them, for he not only has awakened a deeper response from the forest than they have, but is also more at ease in the forest than they are. He has, indeed, made the forest his own by bonding with its spirit and demonstrating his capacity to leave a meaningful trace behind him, and, thus, he has moved beyond mere existence to meaningful existence...<sup>36</sup>

The listener identifies with the posthorn sections because Mahler took great care to utilise a compositional style which results in music which is usually, and by some arbitrary set of subjective judgements, regarded as ‘beautiful’. In doing so, he opened himself up to the charge of banality – of kitsch – but only by a few. Those few have missed the point, although in discussing these episodes in such detail they are perhaps accepting that there is something about them, kitsch or not, which is captivating. The posthorn is *us* – Man – and the point is that we recognise it as such. Its ‘beauty’ however, does not mean it is unthreatening – rather, it takes a great deal more perceptiveness to appreciate the effect that the posthorn is having upon the animals. In short, the juxtaposition of style between the ‘animal’ music and the posthorn is designed to articulate difference, but not the difference between the forest and the

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<sup>35</sup> Knapp, Raymond. *Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in Mahler’s Re-Cycled Songs*, Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Page 141.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* at 145.

‘distant idyll’. Rather, it demonstrates the inherent tension between mankind and animals *in the current system*.

This movement forms an integral part of the hierarchical structure of the Third Symphony, yet, as with the other hierarchically-based movements of ‘Part II’ – that is, movements two through five – it simultaneously points out the structural failings. This is achieved in a variety of ways; the second movement, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, subverts its own stability by reversing the conventional ideas of what ought to form an ‘A’ or a ‘B’ section in a rondo form piece. The third movement is more explicit in its criticism, however: through an accentuation of the juxtaposition of ‘A’ and ‘B’ sections, the structural unity of the movement is compromised, and the listener is at least aware of an underlying opposition, if not its very nature. The third movement of the Third Symphony is an essential link in the chain of creation which the symphony superficially describes. But in pointing out the aforementioned structural failings, it joins the other movements in forming part of Mahler’s Nietzschean critique of that very hierarchy – atop of which sits man. For whilst the third movement concludes with the ‘animal music’, this does not represent a reclamation of the forest by those animals, nor does it represent a blissful synthesis of animal and man, living in newly acquired harmony. Rather, the final passages of the movement – the Coda, if you will – are a masterpiece in Mahlerian misdirection. Raymond Knapp argues that these final passages represent the ‘spiritual flight’ of the animals from the forest, when they are panicked into a realisation of man’s deeper relationship with the forest<sup>37</sup>, but the reality is much less literal than that. Rather, Mahler articulates the fundamental ‘brokenness’ of the system which regards man as ‘higher’ than the animals. Certainly, the passage from Fig.30-Fig.31 utilises many of the bird-call motifs in increasing fervour, but the climax of that passage at Fig.31 is a chord of such violence – so out-of-

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<sup>37</sup> See p.46 above.

keeping with the rest of the movement – that it calls to mind Adorno’s idea of the *Durchbruch*. Indeed, this truly is a moment where the ‘veil of Maya’ is rent asunder, and the listener realises that the hierarchical system which is, on the surface of it, being presented by Mahler is also being subverted, mocked, and will ultimately be denied authenticity. Four bars after this *Durchbruch*, the horns declaim a theme which, as Franklin suggests, might well suggest ‘...the silhouette of Pan himself’<sup>38</sup>, as if to provide the listener with a signpost which points toward the Finale, in which this catastrophic fissure of Being will be redeemed. The closing material may sound triumphant enough, as if there is ultimately a ‘winner’ emerging from this profound juxtaposition, but this is not the case. Rather, Mahler makes considerable use of the triplet material which was the harbinger of so much doom earlier in the movement, and, furthermore, uses the tambourine in the final climactic passage – not only evoking the opening of the Fourth Symphony, where the bells for Adorno are ‘...fools bells, which, without saying it, say: none of what you hear is true’<sup>39</sup>, but anticipating the similarly deceptive use of bells in the fifth movement, as discussed in the following chapter of this thesis. In other words, the Coda of the third movement is intended to patch over the *Durchbruch* – for there is still some considerable way to go in the Chain of Being – whilst simultaneously drawing attention to its own nature as a thin layer of veneer over a fundamental truth which cannot, yet, be allowed to triumph.

These two movements, therefore, represent two steps in the Chain of Being which is articulated in this symphony. But they also articulate a growing sense of unease – a sense in which there is more to the second part of this symphony than simply a musical representation of the natural hierarchy. This is explored subtly – often, imperceptibly – in the second movement, and is developed further in third, albeit

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<sup>38</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 65.

<sup>39</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. (trans. Edmund Jephcott). *Mahler: A Music Physiognomy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Page 56.

in a different context. The third movement prepares the ground for the introduction of Man in the fourth, but does so in such a way as that the listener already realises that any presentation of Man as atop the hierarchy of creation is one with which Mahler will take issue. It is difficult to pinpoint any moments of definite Nietzschean influence in these movements, but that is not a problem, because these two movements are not intended to be overtly so. Rather, Mahler uses them to establish the hierarchical framework of the symphony, but also subtly begins to introduce some of the issues that will be worked through at greater length in later movements. Movements two and three of Mahler's Third Symphony, therefore, are perhaps the movements in which the listener is given the least to go on. That does not, however, mean that there are not significant and meaningful things to be learnt from those movements – rather, Mahler is here at his most subtle, and yet, when the true purpose of the two movements is unearthed, most rewarding.



## Chapter Three: Movements 4 & 5 – Neat Nietzsche vs. Conventional Christianity

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The fourth movement of the Third Symphony is the most overt example of Nietzsche's influence in the whole work; in it, Mahler sets a text from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, specifically the 'Midnight Song'. This movement alone provides a rich seam of discussion, but Mahler's juxtaposition of Nietzsche's text with the text he chooses to set in the fifth movement – a *Wunderhorn* poem entitled *Armer Kinder Bettlerlied*: a text which is undeniably Christian in outlook – is where the real interest is to be found. This chapter deals with both movements individually, before attempting to suggest a reading of the movements which emphasises their interdependence – and which argues that they are not as contradictory as they may appear at first glance. In order to fully understand their significance within the symphony, however, this chapter first discusses Mahler's use of text more generally – how and why he does so, and what precedents there may be for introducing the spoken word to his symphonic writing. A natural progression from this discussion is to consider the two texts set in the fourth and fifth movements out of a musical context; to understand their basic meaning, and then to consider how Mahler may have adapted that meaning, through alterations to the text, or by musical means through its setting. The majority of the chapter, however, is given over to discussing Mahler's musical treatment of the two texts; it is not an in-depth analysis, but rather seeks to look below the compositional surface – and, most importantly, to consider the profound connection between the two movements which is so often overlooked. Mahler's relationship with the idea of 'Humor' and his use of bells are issues which, for example, it is necessary at various points within the chapter to consider in relation to Mahler's wider output, but which are eminently relevant to the Third Symphony.

Through a discussion of the fourth movement, the fifth movement, and the fourth and fifth movement as a whole, in short, this chapter seeks to explore the movements in which Mahler was most overtly influenced by Nietzsche, and to demonstrate both their interdependence, and their crucial role in subverting the overall picture to which they contribute.

### **Movement Four – Nietzsche’s Text**

The fourth movement of the Third Symphony is the first point in the whole work at which Mahler utilises text. The text which Mahler chooses to set – the ‘Midnight Song’ from *TSZ* is of great importance, but before considering this example specifically, it is beneficial to briefly discuss Mahler’s relationship with the idea of text within a symphony – more specifically, the reasoning behind his decisions to use it, or, equally importantly, not to use it. In a letter addressed to Dr Arthur Seidl, and dating from February 1897, Mahler comments on his use of text, saying<sup>1</sup>:

Whenever I plan a large musical structure, I always come to a point where I have to resort to ‘the word’ as a vehicle for my musical idea. – It must have been pretty much the same for Beethoven in his Ninth, except that the right materials were not yet available in his day...Incidentally, I recall R. Wagner somewhere saying the same thing quite baldly. In the last movement of my Second I simply had to go through the whole of world literature, including the Bible, in search of the right word, the ‘Open Sesame’ – and in the end had no choice but to find my own words for my thoughts and feelings.<sup>2</sup>

This is a significant insight into Mahler’s compositional process. For a composer to claim that there comes a moment when only ‘the word’ can express his most fundamental feelings is quite contrary to the received wisdom that ‘Music expresses that which cannot be said, and which cannot be suppressed.’<sup>3</sup> It would also suggest that Mahler viewed his compositions as full contributions to the academic discourse of the

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<sup>1</sup> The letter ostensibly refers to the Second Symphony, but as it dates from the year following the completion of the Third, can be assumed to be equally applicable, given its somewhat general style.

<sup>2</sup> GM to ASI: Mahler, Alma (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 212.

<sup>3</sup> Hugo, Victor (tr. Melville B. Anderson), *William Shakespeare*, Honolulu: University of the Pacific Press, 2001. Page 91.

day, and believed that if he did not use text, he would simply be unnecessarily denying himself a vehicle by which to further express himself. Here, Mahler felt that he could not find the ‘right’ text to set in his Second Symphony (despite his somewhat grandiose-sounding search), and so chose to set his own – not so in the Third. Nevertheless, for the second consecutive symphony, Mahler introduces text at a relatively late juncture (in the Second Symphony it was also in the fourth movement), a parallel which is supportive of the suggestion that Mahler wished to defer the text to the last possible moment, viewing it as something which was quasi-inevitable, yet strangely undesirable. However, the use of text – the spoken voice, the ‘word’ – in the Third Symphony is perhaps less surprising than its usage in the Second, yet arguably even more fundamental. For whilst in the Second Mahler is quite open about the use of text being driven by an inability to express *meaning* in any other way (or, perhaps, the location of a text which expresses that which Mahler was attempting to transmit more clearly than he thought he could achieve musically), in the Third Symphony, whilst the content of the text is, of course, important, just as important is the method of its communication – the human: man. The introduction of the human voice in the Third Symphony is (in some ways) aesthetically reminiscent of that in the Second; both occur in the fourth movement, both movements are relatively lightly scored and both have performance directions which point imply a certain degree of reservation.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most important similarity, however, becomes clear when one looks at Mahler’s comments on the fourth movement of the Second Symphony specifically, which, whilst it sets a text which relies heavily on Christian imagery (reproduced in the following footnote<sup>5</sup>) and

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<sup>4</sup> The fourth movement of the Second Symphony has the performance directions: ‘*Sehr feierlich aber schlicht. (Choralmässig).*’: ‘Very solemn but simple. (Chorale-like).’

<sup>5</sup> ‘*O Röschen roth! / Der Mensch liegt in größter Noth! / Der Mensch liegt in größter Pein! / Je lieber möcht’ ich in Himmel sein! / Da kam ich auf einen breiten Weg; / Da kam in Engelein und wollt’ mich abweisen. / Ach nein! Ich ließ mich nicht abweisen: / Ich bin von Gott und will wieder zu Gott! / Der liebe Gott wird mir ein Lichtchen geben, / Wird leuchten mir bis in das ewig selig Leben!*’: ‘O little red rose! / Man lies in the greatest need. / Man lies in the greatest suffering. / How much rather would I be in Heaven! / I came upon a broad road. / There came an angel and wanted to block my way. / Ah no! I did

which concludes with an undeniably Christian sentiment, Mahler subsequently undermines by describing the movement as ‘...the voice of ingenuous belief.’<sup>6</sup> This sense of ‘all is not as it seems’ is something which may be applied to the Third Symphony equally effectively, and not only in this movement.

### **The Introduction of ‘Man’**

Whilst in the Second Symphony it is the content of the text which provides the interest, in the Third Symphony, just as important is the vehicle for that text: the human voice. With regard to the symphony as a whole, Jens Malte Fischer articulates the generally accepted opinion that: ‘What we have here is clearly the ascent of all organic life to the very highest level...a poem about the whole world, a ‘Commedia superhumana’...’<sup>7</sup>, an opinion which is supported by the programmatic titles Mahler gave the movements, particularly from the second onwards:

#### *Part Two*

- II. What the flowers in the meadow tell me.
- III. What the animals in the forest tell me.
- IV. What man tells me.
- V. What the angels tell me.
- VI. What love tells me.<sup>8</sup>

The entrance of the human voice within this hierarchy follows a movement in which:

...unruly dionysian forces had seemed to push Mahler...into the world of the as yet uncomposed first movement. Like Wagner at the start of the *Ring* cycle, he recreates his music language from fundamental material: a primaeval whole-tone oscillation that is subsequently harmonised...<sup>9</sup>

Mahler treats the opening of the movement exceptionally delicately, instructing the alto soloist to enter (if the performance direction of ‘*Durchaus ppp*’ is adhered to) almost inaudibly, on an open vowel sound (‘O’) which, in the best performances, should ensure

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not let myself be turned away! / I am of God, and to God I shall return. / Dear God will grant me a small light, / Will light my way to eternal, blissful life.’ Translation from: ‘*Gustav Mahler: Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2 in Full Score*. New York: Dover, 1987. Page 379.’

<sup>6</sup> Mahler’s 1901 programme, enclosed in a letter; ‘GM to AS: Mahler, Alma (ed. Donald Mitchell). *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*. London: John Murray Ltd., 1973. Page 213.’

<sup>7</sup> Fischer, Jens Malte (trans. Stewart Spencer), *Gustav Mahler*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Page 276.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 66.

that it takes a split second before the listener realises that the source of the sound is human and not instrumental. (See Ex. 4)

Sehr langsam. Misterioso. Durchaus *ppp*.      Worte von Nietzsche.

Harfen- und S.      1. Violine.      2. Violine.      Viola.      Alt-Solo.      Violoncell.      Contrabass.

1. 5. Horn in F.      2. 7. Horn in F.      3. 8. Horn in F.      4. 6. Horn in F.

Harfen- und S.      1. Viol.      2. Viol.      Viola.      Alt-Solo.      Vcl.      Cb.

950.      951.

Ex. 4

This is not some cheap compositional trick, however, as William J. McGrath points out:

Here, for the first time in the symphony, Mahler uses the human voice, and it is for the purpose of conveying a development of great metaphysical significance. Mahler himself said of this transition from the Tierstück scherzo, "The adagio follows upon it as a confused dream is followed by an awakening – or rather a gentle coming to consciousness of oneself {*sich-seiner-selbst-bewusst-werden*}." At this point in the great chain of being, the intellect comes into play and is focused on the life force which has appeared in such various forms throughout the first three movements.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 142.

Mahler had, therefore, chosen to introduce ‘the word’ to the symphony as a vehicle by which to introduce mankind. Once this concept is grasped, attention can then turn to the content of the text he chose to set.

The “Midnight Song” is found twice in *TSZ* – firstly in Part Three (the third part thereof) entitled “The Second Dance Song”, and then repeated later on, this time with the title “The Intoxicated Song”, or “Zarathustra’s roundelay”. The first time it occurs, it is structured within the chimes of a clock-tower striking midnight:

*One!*  
 O Man! Attend!  
*Two!*  
 What does deep midnight’s voice contend?  
*Three!*  
 I slept my sleep,  
*Four!*  
 And now awake at dreaming’s end:  
*Five!*  
 The world is deep,  
*Six!*  
 Deeper than day can comprehend.  
*Seven!*  
 Deep is its woe,  
*Eight!*  
 Joy – deeper than heart’s agony:  
*Nine!*  
 Woe says: Fade! Go!  
*Ten!*  
 But all joy wants eternity,  
*Eleven!*  
 - wants deep, deep, deep eternity!  
*Twelve!*  
 [...] <sup>11</sup>

When the song returns, it is devoid of the chimes – Zarathustra is rather exhorting the ‘Higher Men’ to repeat to him his ‘roundelay’. This second version, without chimes, is more reminiscent of Mahler’s usage of the poem. Below is the poem as it is found upon its recurrence in *TSZ*, in a translation in which care has been taken to retain its poetic character:

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<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 243/4. *The parenthesised ellipsis included after the twelfth strike of the bell serves to draw attention to the absence of another line; the silence, in this context, is as important as any of the text which precedes it.*

O Man! Attend!  
 What does deep midnight's voice contend?  
 'I slept my sleep,  
 'And now awake at dreaming's end:  
 'The world is deep,  
 'Deeper than day can comprehend.  
 'Deep is its woe,  
 'Joy – deeper than heart's agony:  
 'Woe says: Fade! Go!  
 'But all joy wants eternity,  
 'Wants deep, deep, deep eternity!'<sup>12</sup>

Now, here is the poem as translated by Peter Franklin, who takes care to point out that this translation '...aims at literal clarity rather than poetic quality: it reproduces Mahler's rearrangement of the Nietzsche original and his omission of the quotation marks. The German text is Nietzsche's, with Mahler's added line in square brackets.'<sup>13</sup>:

*O Mensch! Gib Acht!  
 Was spricht die tiefe Mitternacht?  
 „Ich schlief, ich schlief –  
 Aus tiefem Traum bin ich erwacht:–  
 Die Welt ist tief,  
 Und tiefer als der Tag gedacht.*

*[O Mensch! O Mensch!]  
 Tief ist ihr Weh –  
 Lust – tiefer noch als Herzeleid;  
 Weh spricht; Vergeh!  
 Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit –  
 - will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit!"*

O man! Take heed!  
 What does the deep midnight say?  
 I slept! I slept!  
 I have awoken from deep dreaming!  
 The world is deep!  
 And deeper than the day conceives!

O man! O man!  
 Deep! Deep is its woe!  
 Joy, joy deeper still that heart-ache!  
 Woe says: be lost!  
 But all joy wills eternity! -  
 Wills deep, deep eternity!<sup>14</sup>

Mahler's adaptation of the poem is driven primarily by the desire simply to create two stanzas, but the choice of words for the extra line is significant – the repetition of 'man' emphasises the positioning of the fourth movement within the Chain of Being Mahler is seeking to depict in the second group (mvts. II-V) of the Third Symphony.

The movement opens ambiguously; the lower strings oscillate almost inaudibly between *A* and *B*, a technique which prevents the listener from immediately grasping the tonality<sup>15</sup>. The time signatures are somewhat irrelevant – the irregular number of oscillations, as well as the shifting position of the 'strong beat' are further sources of

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 333.

<sup>13</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 113.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* at 67.

<sup>15</sup> Described by Peter Franklin as '...a primaevial whole-tone oscillation...'. See p. 51 above.

disorientation. The entry of the alto in b.11 (see Ex. 4 above) is the first point at which some awareness of key is possible – even so, however, Mahler shifts the ground under the listener’s feet. The first occurrence of ‘*O Mensch!*’ sees the harmony move from a hopefully serene F major, to an ominous A minor, with the soloist functioning as the pivot; in a sense permitting the listener at least some stability amongst the shifting tonality. There follows two minim beats of silence (already a recurring theme in the opening) – a period which permits the listener to digest the significance of what they have just heard, ponder what may happen next, and, perhaps most importantly, begin to become a little discomfited. This would seem to relate well to the silence following the stroke of midnight in the first occurrence of the ‘Midnight Song’ in *TSZ*<sup>16</sup>, which is by no means comfortable. The second ‘*O Mensch!*’ is more resignedly pessimistic: a somewhat surprising F# minor (the alto still functioning as the ‘golden thread’ through this progression) resolving back into A minor, with the alto once again providing the tonic in conjunction with the first violins and assorted horns. This is followed by a further two-beat rest, the second a fermata, which brings to a close the introductory section.

Of course, whilst this brief analysis is both interesting and relevant, it is perhaps the non-musically-educated listener who most acutely *experiences* what Mahler does here. McGrath above quotes Mahler, who regards this opening as a ‘gentle coming to consciousness of oneself’; the first seventeen bars of the movement can take over a minute to negotiate, and evoke a drowsy and prolonged extraction from slumber; disorientated, yet ever more aware of that which is happening. Whilst the musically-educated listener stands a chance of comprehending at least some of what is going on during this introduction, those without musical knowledge can experience the complete disorientation intended by Mahler.

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<sup>16</sup> See p.55 above.



Before progressing any further through the movement (particularly textually), it is vital to recognise that the insertion of an extra line into the “Midnight Song” by Mahler is representative of the distortion of meaning which Mahler enforces upon the text:

The text which Mahler chose to communicate this profoundly important idea was the *trunkene Lied* (drunken song) from Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, but whatever Mahler may owe to Nietzsche in terms of the form and structure of his work, the message Mahler conveys with Nietzsche’s words is one that significantly modifies the basic intent of Nietzsche’s poem.<sup>17</sup>

McGrath goes on to concisely identify what he believes to be the ‘basic intent’ of the (unmodified) poem, saying:

The imagery of this poem represents the traditional Wagnerian dichotomy between the rational phenomenal world of day and the essential passional world of night. The poem is a statement of Nietzsche’s belief that the world encompassed more than could be grasped by reason alone, and that even though the counsel of human misery (*Weh*) was to accept annihilation or resignation, the element which reason was unable to comprehend, the will, (represented here as desire, *Lust*) rejected this to affirm its desire for a deep eternity of willing.<sup>18</sup>

At this point, it is perhaps beneficial to take a step back from Mahler’s use of the poem, and indeed McGrath’s interpretation of it, which is unapologetically influenced by Wagner, and consider the poem in its context within *TSZ*.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the poem is the characterisation of ‘midnight’. ‘Midnight’ personified is the owner of some profound wisdom – a revelation of both sorrow and joy, and the keeper of the knowledge which permits the understanding of the relationship between those two states. Unarguably, the culmination of the poem (thematically speaking) is the idea of *eternity* – it is perhaps best left to Nietzsche himself to explicate this:

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<sup>17</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 142.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Did you ever say Yes to one joy? O my friends, then said Yes to *all* woe as well.  
 All things are chained and entwined together, all things are in love;  
 if ever you wanted one moment twice, if ever you said: 'You please me,  
 happiness, instant, moment!' then you wanted *everything* to return!  
 you wanted everything anew, everything eternal, everything chained,  
 entwined together, everything in love, O that is how you *loved* the world,  
 you everlasting men, loved it eternally and for all time: and you say even to  
 woe: 'Go, but return!' *For all joy wants – eternity!*<sup>19</sup>

The poem, therefore, as found in *TSZ*, is intimately connected with one of Nietzsche's most well-known ideas: that of the 'eternal recurrence'. 'Joy' as a creative force is inextricably linked to 'woe', and, as Nietzsche says above, to desire the return of one joyful moment is to desire the return of everything; all woeful moments, and to be content in that knowledge: the definition of the *Übermensch*. This is, of course, a simplification, but the above is sufficient to precipitate a discussion of Mahler's treatment of the poem.

The influence of Siegfried Lipiner, one of Mahler's closest friends, on his intellectual life is impossible to underestimate. Julian Johnson, via Federico Celestini, suggests that:

...Mahler's use of the "Midnight Song" is, Celestini suggests, shaped by Lipiner's interpretation rather than a reading of the poem based on its setting within Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* alone.<sup>20</sup>

Johnson dedicates some significant space to exploring the influence of Lipiner on Mahler's interpretation of Nietzsche, a redacted version of which it is well worth reproducing here:

It was certainly Lipiner who shaped Mahler's reading of Nietzsche between 1891 and 1897, and Lipiner would appear to have been a key influence on the development of the Third Symphony. Federico Celestini suggests that Lipiner was "a kind of mentor to Mahler," giving him literary and philosophical guidance. Constantin Floros suggests that two poems form [sic] Lipiner's *Buch der Freude* (1880) have direct bearing on Mahler's work on the Third Symphony. The subtitles that Mahler appended to each movement correspond to similar ideas in Lipiner's poem "Genesis," and the Finale of the Symphony shows fascinating parallels with Lipiner's poem "Hymne." According to

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 332.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, Julian, *Mahler's Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Page 199.

William J. McGrath, Mahler made “repeated declarations that his music was more closely related to Lipiner’s plays than anyone could ever know.”<sup>21</sup>

Johnson above mentions William McGrath, whose close analysis of the fourth movement of the symphony draws attention to the ways in which he believes Mahler subtly alters the meaning of Nietzsche’s text. McGrath’s opening remark sets his subsequent comments in context:

Not only is this the first movement to employ words, it is also the movement in which the life-will motif finds its most elaborate development and explication. Musically, the subject of the movement is the dialogue between the life-will motif, the rising and falling theme representing the realm of feeling, and the human voice, representative of intellect, a dialogue through which the will first becomes aware of its own nature, and then, as the dialogue becomes a duet, realizes the possibility of transcending that nature.<sup>22</sup>

This idea is separate from the actual content of the text, in McGrath’s view, as he goes on to say that ‘...the text Mahler chose to communicate this profoundly important idea was the *trunkene Lied*...’<sup>23</sup> – suggesting that the ‘idea’ was extant independently of the words. He continues:

[Mahler’s modification of Nietzsche’s basic intent is one] that the young Nietzsche, the devoted follower of Schopenhauer and Wagner, might have accepted, but it is more clearly the particular expression of Mahler’s own Wagnerian faith. Mahler could use the poem because it spoke the same Wagnerian language, but in his union of word with tone a new dimension of meaning was added.<sup>24</sup>

McGrath suggests that ‘...Mahler follows Nietzsche’s basic meaning up to the final two lines...’<sup>25</sup>, and follows this up with a brief discussion of the musical setting of the words up to that point. His discussion of the first six lines (Mahler’s first stanza), which are concerned with *night*, emphasises Mahler’s attempt to make obvious the ‘enormously rich depths of being which daylight thought could not penetrate.’<sup>26</sup>; an effort to evoke both the stillness, yet also the creative force of that night. Following

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, Julian, *Mahler’s Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Page 198/9.

<sup>22</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 142.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid* at 144.

this passage is the first moment at which Mahler's re-interpretation of Nietzsche's text is explicit – the double restatement of '*O Mensch!*', which serves both to add a certain symmetry to the text, but also introduces, as McGrath puts it, '...the most obviously didactic part of the movement.'<sup>27</sup> Within the 'didactic' stanza, McGrath focuses most notably on the phrase 'Deep, Deep / Deep is her woe', which, he claims, Mahler sets in such a way so as:

The coincidence of human misery with the affirmative ascending portion of the will motif accurately reflects the conviction of Schopenhauer, Wagner, and at least the early Nietzsche that the affirmation of the individual will was the source of all human misery.

It is, however, perhaps the conclusion of the text which interests McGrath the most, and it is his opinions here which betray his underlying position. In pointing out that:

In the concluding lines of Nietzsche's poem there is a clear shift toward the emphatic mood ("But all desire wants eternity -/- wants deep, deep eternity!") while in Mahler's symphony the emotional direction – and punctuation expressing it – is from affirmation to resignation ("But all desire wants eternity! -/- wants deep, deep eternity.")...In this way Mahler places the final emphasis of the movement on the idea of resignation, and thus in both theme and tone points forward to the ultimate resolution of the will's striving in the concluding sixth movement.<sup>28</sup>

McGrath claims that Mahler, rather than embracing the idea of eternity, as Nietzsche would have the reader see as the goal (acquisition of the status of *Übermensch*), adapts the text and supporting music so as to leave the way open for a more conventional resolution:

The conclusion of the movement suggests Mahler's conviction that the striving will can finally find peace and salvation in reunion with God.<sup>29</sup>

This is a striking assertion, and one which McGrath attempts to justify by claiming that '...the central point of the composition is more Mahlerian than Nietzschean or Schopenhauerian.'<sup>30</sup>, and which is, in McGrath's mind, supported by the fifth movement which sets an overtly Christian text. Rather, Mahler negates the

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<sup>27</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 142.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* at 147.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

*Übermensch*-oriented direction of the movement because he needs to make it clear that such an outcome cannot be achieved under the current conditions.

### **Movement Five**

The progression from the fourth to the fifth movement of the Third Symphony, as well as a more general consideration of the two movements individually, exposes perhaps the most fertile soil for scholars to cultivate their divergent ideas. This area of the work is particularly where the discussion of the extent of Mahler's influence by Christianity receives its most critical examination – the shape of which will be considered following a more in-depth look at the fifth movement.

Originally titled 'What the Morning Bells Tell Me', the title evolved, by the time of a performance of the second movement (alone – but accompanied by a programme for the whole symphony) to: 'What the Angels Tell Me'. Both titles bear relation to the content of the movement; the 'morning bells', evoked by the children's chorus exclamations of "Bimm Bamm", dispel the gloom of night left by the fourth movement, whilst to use the term 'angels' in the title positions the movement more convincingly within the hierarchy of creation which Mahler wished to illustrate. (See Ex. 5):

**4 abgestimmte Glocken**  
In der Tonhöhe von (nicht eine Oktave höher!)

**Knabenchor**  
Der Ton ist dem Klang einer Glocke nachzuahmen, der Vocal kurz nachschlagen und der Ton durch den Consonanten **M** rumsend auszuhalten

**1. 2. Flöte**  
**3. 4.**

**1. 2. Oboe**  
**3. 4.**

**1. Clarinette in B.**  
(für diesen Satz übernimmt die 2. Es-Clar. die 3. B-Clarinette)  
**2. 3.**

**Clarinette in Es.**  
(womöglich mehrfach besetzt)

**Bassclarinette in B.**

**3 Fagotte.**

**Lustig im Tempo und keck im Ausdruck.**

nicht zu stark! *sf sf sf sf sf*

Bimm bamm bimm bamm bimm bamm bimm bamm

Bimm bamm bimm bamm bimm bamm bimm bamm bimm bamm

zu 2 *ff* zu 2 *ff* zu 2 *ff* zu 2 *p*

zu 3 *stacc.* zu 3 *stacc.*

**Ex. 5**

Whilst angels are not exclusively a Christian concept (they are present in all three Abrahamic religions), in the context of fin-de-siècle Europe, Mahler's use of the term suggests strong Christian connotations. Angels are recognised (particularly in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible) as 'messengers of God', the source of the term being the Greek word ἄγγελος (angelos), a translation of the Hebrew מַלְאָךְ (mal'akh), both terms translating as 'messenger' – meaning that Mahler's positioning of the term within a title which concludes with '...tell me' is particularly apt.

The movement is approximately four minutes long, making it less than half the length of any other movements in the symphony. After the decidedly serious and comparatively lengthy fourth movement, the opening of the fifth is a refreshing tonic to the listener: '...the 'morning-bell' ostinato of children's voices, whose 'Bimm, bamm, bimm, bamm' rings out in F major after the last sepulchral A of the Nietzsche setting has died away...' <sup>31</sup> initially suggesting a movement which, in terms of mood, is diametrically opposed to that which preceded it. It is perhaps at this point that the

<sup>31</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 69.

schism between observers' opinions on what can crudely be described as the 'Nietzsche-God split' becomes most expansive. Indeed, as Niekerk points out:

Scholars have been baffled by Mahler's use of religious imagery in the fifth movement of the Third Symphony, because it seems to constitute a clear break with the *Zarathustra* text in the fourth movement and with Nietzsche's anti-Christian philosophical agenda in general...<sup>32</sup>

Before considering the fifth movement more generally, however, it is necessary to reproduce in full the text set within it:

*Es sangen drei Engel einen süßen Gesang;  
Mit Freunden es selig in dem Himmel klang,  
Sie jauchzten fröhlich auch dabei,  
Dass Petrus sei von Sünden frei.*

Three angels were singing a sweet song,  
In blissful joy it rang through heaven,  
They shouted too for joy,  
That Peter was set free from sin.

*Und als der Herr Jesus zu Tische sass,  
Mit seinen zwölf Jüngern das Abendmahl ass,  
Da sprach der Herr Jesus: Was stehst du denn hier?  
Wenn ich din anseh', so weinest du mir!*

And as the Lord Jesus sat at table,  
And ate the supper with his disciples,  
Lord Jesus said: Why do you stand here?  
When I look at you, you weep at me.

*„Und sollt' ich nicht weinen, du gütiger Gott?  
Ich hab übertreten die zehn Gebot,  
Ich gehe und weine ja bitterliche.  
Ach komm' und erbarme dich über mich!"*

'And should I not weep, thou bounteous God?  
I have broken the Ten Commandments,  
I wander weeping bitterly.  
Oh come and have mercy on me!'

*Hast du denn übertreten die zehn Gebot,  
So fall auf die Knie und bete zu Gott!  
Liebe nur Gott in alle Zeit!  
So wirst du erlangen die himmlische Freud'.*

If you have broken the Ten Commandments  
Then fall on your knees and pray to God.  
Only love God all the time!  
Thus will you gain heavenly joy.

*Die himmlische Freud' ist ein' selige Stadt,  
Die himmlische Freud', die kein Ende mehr hat!  
Die himmlische Freude war Petro bereit't  
Durch Jesum, und Allen zur Seligkeit.*

Heavenly Joy is a blessed city,  
Heavenly joy, that has no end!  
Heavenly Joy was granted to Peter,  
Through Jesus, and to all men for eternal bliss.<sup>33</sup>

As Raymond Knapp points out:

The original poem is straightforward enough: three angels sing of Peter being free of sin, and of Jesus forgiving a penitent who has broken the Ten Commandments. The poem strongly implies that the penitent is Peter himself, and that the Peter in question is St. Peter – one of the first and easily the most famous of sinners redeemed through Jesus' intervention – but it is not fully explicit about these identities.<sup>34</sup>

Knapp goes on to suggest that Mahler seizes upon this ambiguity of identity:

...framing the narrative of the penitent as a separate episode, with Peter's redemption serving as inspiration and model, and second by casting the lines

<sup>32</sup> Niekerk, Carl, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 110.

<sup>33</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 69.

<sup>34</sup> Knapp, Raymond, *Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in Mahler's Re-Cycled Songs*, Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Page 29.

of the penitent for solo alto, suggesting even more strongly that the penitent may not be St. Peter himself.<sup>35</sup>

Importantly, the solo alto to whom Mahler has entrusted the text is the same alto who sang the words of the Midnight Song one movement previously. This lends credence to the suggestion that, in Mahler's treatment of the *Wunderhorn* poem, the penitent is not St. Peter, but is connected deeply with the voice of the fourth movement. The fifth-movement-voice is not a solitary one, but rather represents *all* voices, just as it did in the previous movement – the introduction of the human voice represented the 'coming to consciousness' of *mankind*, a point which becomes all the stronger if one assumes that Mahler's use of the alto voice was guided more by timbral preferences than gender-based connotations. Certainly, attempting to establish the identity of the penitent is not the point:

...by further obscuring the specific identity of the penitent, Mahler allows him or her to serve more generally for humankind; it is thus humankind who has broken the Ten Commandments but who may nonetheless be redeemed.<sup>36</sup>

The above quotation appropriately illustrates the point that the solo voice is representative of something much more significant, but its final few words ('...who may nonetheless be redeemed') betray Knapp's underlying ideology, illustrated perhaps most effectively in a comment about the very opening of the movement:

At one stroke of its opening bell, however, "Ed sungen drei Engel" seems to solve Nietzsche's quandary; in Mahler's "happy science," if not in Nietzsche's, Christian redemption is not only possible, but freely given to all who seek it appropriately.<sup>37</sup>

With one sentence, Knapp positions himself in the school of thought which argues that, fundamentally, Mahler's outlook is a Christian one, albeit one which is articulated in a furious working-through of the problems Nietzsche's influence poses upon that viewpoint. He joins Constantin Floros, who claims of the symphony as a whole:

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<sup>35</sup> Knapp, Raymond, *Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in Mahler's Re-Cycled Songs*, Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Page 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



Comparing Mahler's hermeneutic commentary regarding his Third with Nietzsche's 'The Happy Science' and 'Also Sprach Zarathustra', it is clear that the Symphony's programmatic concept is diametrically opposed to Nietzsche's philosophy. To clarify: Nietzsche's doctrine of the super-human derives consistently from the statement that God is "dead". In 'The Happy Science', Nietzsche calls himself expressly "Godless and anti-metaphysical". Mahler, however, believed strongly in metaphysics, and in the existence of God, whom he understood as love.<sup>38</sup>

Floros' view of the symphony as a whole, but more specifically Knapp's appraisal of the fifth movement, are both short-sighted. Peter Franklin begins his account of the movement by stating quite explicitly his belief that Nietzsche underlies the whole symphony, but goes on to say:

The elaborate artifice of the previous movement's song of individuated inwardness is now replaced by a public celebration – a musical party to which everyone has been invited, from the local church choir to the village band. They tell the penitent woman that all will be well if she loves God and kneels in prayer (were her words intended in the poem to be St Peter's?). Private agony may here be overcome in the religious practice of the social group.<sup>39</sup>

This corporate 'religious practice' manifests itself joyfully, and on the surface, it would seem that Mahler is offering this as a glimpse of a form of redemption – an 'alternative' to the idea of eternal recurrence so clearly articulated in the fourth movement. This is not the case. As Franklin points out:

...the very fact that this is a *Wunderhorn* poem, a naïve song of bells and angels, reminds us that we are back in the 'dream', on our ascending path through the levels of internalized being. We are only passing through this humorously posited mode of experience: a miniature reminder of the unruly forces of Nature that had rampaged in the first movement.<sup>40</sup>

To interpret this movement as part of a 'dream' is a brave move, particularly considering the early title of 'What the Morning Bells Tell Me' seems to emphasise its position as the antithesis of the fourth movement's evocation of night. Indeed, Jeremy Barham makes an interesting comparison between the fourth-to-fifth-movement transition, and Jean Paul's '*Rede des toten Christus vom Weltgebäude herab, daß kein Gott sei*' ('Speech of the Dead Christ from the Universe that there is no God'), in which the faithful dead are informed (by Christ) that their God does not exist in a 'nihilistic,

<sup>38</sup> Floros, Constantin (trans. Vernon Wicker). *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994. Page 91.

<sup>39</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 70.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

almost Gothic, vision'<sup>41</sup>, before waking to a comforting pastoral scene. If we are to accept the beginning of the fifth movement as 'day', in contrast to the fourth movement's 'night', however, it is equally possible to do so through the prism of *TSZ*, where:

On the morning after this night, however, Zarathustra sprang up from his bed, girded his loins, and emerged from his cave, glowing and strong, like a morning sun emerging from behind dark mountains.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly, to suggest that Mahler sought to directly represent this *TSZ*-influenced transition at the beginning of the fifth movement would be absurd, but to posit the idea that he intended there to be a slight similarity is less so. It is easy to make such a claim – to draw parallels where perhaps there are none – but it is convincing to argue that in ensuring the transition between the two movements is faintly reminiscent of the transition between night and day in *TSZ*, Mahler was providing a subtle 'signpost'<sup>43</sup> to his audience, suggesting that it would be foolish to assume that Nietzsche's influence had come to an end with the final notes of the fourth movement.

### **Mahler and the Bell**

The 'Bimm Bamm' of the children's chorus at the beginning of the fifth movement is perhaps one of the best known motifs in the whole symphony (See Ex. 5 above). Indeed, the *bell* is an important concept in much of Mahler's writing – and it is of particular significance in the current discussion. Julian Johnson has discussed the significance of bells in his book *Mahler's Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies*, and points out that Mahler's use of bells '...draws on the ancient

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<sup>41</sup> Barham, Jeremy M., *Mahler's Third Symphony and the Philosophy of Gustav Fechner: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Criticism, Analysis and Interpretation.*, Ph.D. Diss: University of Surrey, 1998. Page 408.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 333. *This passage immediately follows the second occurrence of the Midnight Song.*

<sup>43</sup> A term Mahler himself used to describe the purpose of his programmes, most notably in a letter to Max Marschall, quoted in: "Hefling, Stephen E., *Mahler's "Totenfeier" and the Problem of Program Music*, 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Summer, 1988): 27-53. Page 28."

function of bells as a collective summons.’<sup>44</sup> This is a relatively obvious statement – equally obvious is Johnson’s choice of the Second Symphony as an example of this usage of the bell:

This ritualistic aspect of bells, their call to collectivity as well as an invocation of the deity, is often heard in the earlier symphonies. In the Second, unsurprisingly, it gilds the final pages with the same overt religiosity as does the sonority of the organ; three bells here join forces with two tam-tams to suggest the vast resonating space of the cathedral...<sup>45</sup>

Johnson’s phrasing here is apt: in using the term ‘religiosity’, he permits an interpretation of the Second Symphony in which the Finale is ostensibly ‘...a reaffirmation of the Christian belief in resurrection and immortality.’<sup>46</sup>, but which stops short of invoking the Christian dogma of *judgment*, and therefore forfeits any right to be regarded as a fundamentally Christian work. Theodor Adorno claims of the Fourth Symphony:

Nowhere is Mahler music more pseudomorphous than in the seraphic symphony. The bells in the first measure that very softly tinge the eighth notes in the flute have always shocked the normal listener, who feels he is being played for a fool. They really are a fool’s bells, which, without saying it, say: none of what you now hear is true...<sup>47</sup>

The bells to which he refers are high (‘sleigh’-) bells – reminiscent of the bells evoked in the Third Symphony. These bells, imitated by the children in the fifth movement, are, too, fools bells; Mahler’s use of bells in the finale of the Second Symphony (a movement which is not as Christian as it seems), and his warning, delivered in the form of bells, to the listener at the beginning of the Fourth that ‘...none of what you now hear is true...’ strongly suggest that where Mahler uses bells to lend an air of religiosity, the listener must immediately assume that all is not as it seems. Furthermore, Mahler’s choice of the ‘Midnight Song’ as the text for the fourth movement opened up perhaps

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<sup>44</sup> Johnson, Julian, *Mahler’s Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Page 69.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Cooke, Deryck, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, London: Faber & Faber, 1980. Page 52.

<sup>47</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. (trans. Edmund Jephcott). *Mahler: A Music Physiognomy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Page 56.

the most obvious opportunity for bells; the first time the poem is recited, each line is preceded and succeeded by a bell-stroke, as has already been discussed. Johnson suggests that:

In the fourth movement of the Third Symphony, Nietzsche's "O Mensch" appears out of a nocturnal tolling of single bell sounds, the low harp pedal and single chords in the trombones answered by the high "overtone" of string and harp harmonics.<sup>48</sup>

- a claim which is at best tenuous. The chords to which Johnson refers are not particularly bell-like, and they occur too often to be considered single strokes. In addition, neither had Mahler ever been, nor would be again, so keen to only *suggest* bells, rather than simply use them (or clearly evoke them). If Johnson's claim has been repudiated, therefore, then a very strong argument must be made that in *omitting* to use bells in the one place where they are explicitly and undeniably appropriate, Mahler is signalling that when he *does* use them, they mean something more than simply the usual connotations – they suggest, in this case, a Nietzschean subtext.

Of course, none of this explains why – if as is claimed in the previous paragraph, Mahler has no qualms about using real bells – the composer chooses to use children to evoke the sound of the instrument (however obviously), rather than using bells themselves. Perhaps the most obvious explanation is Mahler's emphasis of the importance of the community in this movement; a quotation derived from Peter Franklin, used some pages previously, describes it as: '...a public celebration – a musical party to which everyone has been invited, from the local church choir to the village band.'<sup>49</sup> – an interpretation which suggests that the use of children is a conscious compositional technique to increase the sense of the collective.

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<sup>48</sup> Johnson, Julian, *Mahler's Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Page 69.

<sup>49</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 70.

### **The Child in the Fifth Movement**

Children hold a significance over and above simply forming another section of society represented by Mahler's evocation of a collective, however. In *TSZ*, Nietzsche attributes great importance to the child, saying:

The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling when, a first motion, a sacred Yes.<sup>50</sup>

Carl Niekerk is typically forthright in his assessment of the Nietzschean implications of Mahler's use of children – using as his starting point the quotation from *TSZ* reproduced above, he goes on to claim that:

The important thing for Nietzsche, is that children represent an affirmative attitude toward life, an innocent beginning of something new that is simultaneously an act of forgetting, that is instinctive and not rationally planned; children are also associated with play.<sup>51</sup>

This finds its resolution in Niekerk's final pronouncement on the 'meaning' of the child in the fifth movement:

Through the image of the child, humankind can find its way back to a revitalized way of living. Tragic denial of life is turned into its opposite: the affirmation of life, as Nietzsche envisioned it. Children's humor and their ability to laugh stand for the ability to see the relativity of things, to have a playful outlook on life combined with an affirmative attitude and a new sense of community. This is the meaning of the children's choir's "Bimm Bamm" accompanying the text of the Third Symphony's fifth movement.<sup>52</sup>

Peter Franklin offers a more nuanced approach, suggesting that the children, rather than making an explicitly Nietzschean point themselves, contribute to certain sense of playfulness which Mahler attempts to evoke, and even then, only as 'one possibility of redemption':

Along with the children, the bells and the merrily dotted march-tune, the angels speak for a matter-of-fact world of sprightliness and guttersnipe effrontery (the directions *keck* and *munter* are explicit). Mahler offers this as one possibility of redemption, recalling Nietzsche's laughing children and angels who had dispelled Zarathustra's gloom.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 55.

<sup>51</sup> Niekerk, Carl, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 110.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 70.

Both Niekerk and Franklin touch on the concept of ‘humour’ in their discussion of the use of the child; Julian Johnson points out that Mahler once wrote in a letter that his Third Symphony was ‘...my most mature and individual work, and full of humour.’<sup>54</sup> Johnson recognises, however, that a discussion of the role of humour in Mahler’s music, but in this instance, particularly his Third Symphony, must be preceded by a consideration of what the term meant for the composer. Johnson claims that ‘*humor*’ as understood by Mahler was a term borrowed from Schumann, whose own understanding may be traced back to the work of E.T.A Hoffman, and Jean Paul Richter:

Jean Paul defined *Humor* as “the inverted sublime” because it makes visible the contrast between the finite, everyday world of individual things and people and the infinitude of the world of spirit and ideas. It does so not by attempting directly to represent something infinite (as in the romantic sublime), but by focusing on the immediate, sensuous, and particular as foil to the ideas of the infinite. By exposing the limits of the merely finite world, Jean Paul argues, the humorist reveals its inadequacy and thereby projects a sense of the infinite.<sup>55</sup>

This analysis of Jean Paul’s concept of ‘*Humor*’ would struggle to be any more relevant to the fifth movement of the Third Symphony. Mahler’s depiction of (to borrow once again Peter Franklin’s phrase) ‘...a matter-of-fact world of sprightliness and guttersnipe effrontery...’ – his evocation of a folk-scene, as it were, replete with aural sigils – is about as far from ideas of the ‘romantic sublime’ as it is possible to get. Of course, there is no need for ‘*Humor*’ to invoke the sacred to make its point; Jean Paul, according to Johnson, claims that it need only deal in the finite, drawing attention to its own limitations, in order to achieve the desired effect of creating a sense of the infinite – but in doing so, Mahler rather emphasises his point. The title of the song - *Armer Kinder Bettlerlied* (Poor Children’s Begging Song) – ensures that the literary content is at odds with its usage (positioned as it is within a somewhat earthy, more worldly context), whilst the final verse, which deals

<sup>54</sup> GM to HB in ‘*Mahler’s Unknown Letters* (ed. Herta Blaukopf) London: Gollancz, 1986. Page 26.’ quoted in ‘Johnson, Julian, *Mahler’s Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Page 125.’

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, Julian, *Mahler’s Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Page 125.

with the nature of ‘heavenly joy’ which the (forgiven) penitent can expect to experience is accompanied by the (seemingly) joyous scoring of the opening passage, preceded, just in case the listener hadn’t quite yet got the point, with the children’s choir being instructed to declaim: ‘*Liebe nur Gott!*’ (Love only God!), marked *f*, each note accented (See Ex. 6).



Ex. 6

As such, Mahler has both focussed his attention on the *worldly*, through his evocation of a community gathering, but has also utilised an explicitly Christian text. The significance of this is complex: following Jean Paul, he has concentrated primarily on the immediate – the children’s choir, the march rhythms, the bells – yet he has set this immediacy against a text which is clearly religious. The meaning of the text itself is purposefully clouded – the continuity of voice between the fourth and fifth movements suggests a level of connection not perceptible at first glance, compounded by the middle section’s move back into the key of the previous movement, as well as the resemblance between the transition of the movements and the transition of sections in *TSZ*. This, combined with his use of bells, which, as has been argued some pages previously<sup>56</sup>, signals that the meaning apparent on the surface of the music is not necessarily the underlying one, suggests that Mahler went a step further than Jean Paul’s definition of ‘*Humor*’ – not content with simply allowing his observations of the worldly to evoke the other-worldly, he sought to view a corporate religious experience through the filter of *TSZ*. The movement is almost cinematographic – it is the depiction of an event, appreciated at one remove. Mahler wants more than to evoke a sense of the other-worldly, he wants to view it and then mock the Christian conception of it; a simplistic (and explicitly Christian)

<sup>56</sup> See p.69-69 above.

approach to everlasting life ('If you have broken the Ten Commandments / Then fall on your knees and pray to God. / Only love God all the time! / Thus you will gain heavenly joy.') is quite at odds with the idea espoused in the fourth movement ('But all joy wills eternity! Wills deep, deep eternity!'); the fifth movement categorically does not '...solve Nietzsche's quandary...' <sup>57</sup> – it provides no 'solutions'. If anything, it offers what Mahler perceives to be a false alternative – a well-established and popular method of tolerating life, but one which is ultimately, in Nietzsche's eyes, untrue. The eternity willed for in the fourth movement is not the eternity taught by the organised Christian faith and represented in the fifth – it is *eternal recurrence*, Nietzsche's leitmotif, the acceptance of which is the ultimate goal. If the fourth movement of the Second Symphony is '...the voice of ingenuous belief.'<sup>58</sup>, then the fifth movement of the Third is a depiction of the same – a musical portrait of the childlike, the facile, the self-deceptive: the *wrong*.

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<sup>57</sup> Knapp, Raymond, *Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in Mahler's Re-Cycled Songs*, Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Page 29.

<sup>58</sup> Mahler's 1901 programme, enclosed in a letter; 'GM to AS: Mahler, Alma (ed. Donald Mitchell). *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*. London: John Murray Ltd., 1973. Page 213.'



## Chapter Four: Movement Six & the Original Seventh Movement

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...an affirmative-sounding Adagio lasting some twenty-five minutes, pursuing its leisurely course with its seemingly unshakeable belief in truth, beauty and goodness...<sup>1</sup>

This how Mahler biographer Jens Malte Fischer describes the final movement of the Third Symphony: the *Adagio*. For the second consecutive symphony, an *Adagio* concludes the work— and for the second consecutive symphony, the final *Adagio* is key to developing a greater understanding of the symphony as a whole. More than any other movement in the Third Symphony, however, the *Adagio* has been systematically misinterpreted; misinterpretation which, thanks to its integral role within this symphony, cannot but taint consideration of the other movements.

This chapter is, broadly speaking, split into two halves. The first half takes as its starting point perhaps the most gross misinterpretation of the *Adagio* commonly cited – that it is somehow ‘about’ or a representation of, the Christian God. Taking issue with this statement necessarily precipitates a brief discussion of the usefulness of terms such as ‘programme music’ and ‘absolute music’, a discussion which leads directly on to a consideration of Mahler’s own thoughts (as manifest in letters and programmes, for example) regarding the movement, including about the programmatic title “What Love Tells Me”. Such a discussion, however, is impossible without a detailed consideration of the movement which Mahler had initially intended to conclude the Third Symphony - *Das himmlische Leben* – and which now functions as the finale of the Fourth. The importance of this ‘seventh’ movement’s inclusion in the ‘original’ symphony is

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<sup>1</sup> Fischer, Jens Malte (trans. Stewart Spencer), *Gustav Mahler*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Page 274.

evaluated, as is (more importantly) the impact of its removal on the remainder of the work, with particular reference to the movement that consequently became the finale. These discussions inform the second half of the chapter, which, through study of the score, suggests a strongly Nietzschean reading of the *Adagio*, in which God plays no part, but in which Mahler's writing is not linked explicitly to one particular idea, but rather which synthesises ideas drawn from across Nietzsche's oeuvre: a true constellation of influence.

### **Programmatic Misconceptions & the Importance of the 'Seventh Movement'**

That the *Adagio* represents the Christian God, sitting as it does at the pinnacle of Mahler's creative hierarchy, is perhaps the most common – and dramatic – misconception; one which is epitomised in the work of Henry-Louis de La Grange, perhaps Mahler's best-known biographer, who describes the whole symphony thus:

The finished work was an imposing fresco dedicated to the glory of creation, starting with inanimate nature and progressing step by step to its highest form, that is to say, God.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to overstate the influence that this view has had on the general public's reception of both the Third Symphony more generally, but also the *Adagio* specifically. Fischer's description of the nature of the movement – the opening words of this chapter – consciously avoids using the term 'God', but the terminology he does employ is easily identifiable as that which is often also used to describe God; listeners and readers often confuse the phrase '...truth, beauty and goodness...' (qualities which Christians would argue are found without measure in God) with the concept of God specifically, a misreading which contributes significantly to the *Adagio*'s consequent mis-programmaticisation by the listening public. However, Peter Franklin points out that: 'In striking contrast to Mahler's previous two finales, this movement does not present a

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<sup>2</sup> de La Grange, Henry-Louis, *Mahler: Volume One*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1976. Page 377.

clearly evolving programmatic narrative.’<sup>3</sup>, and in doing so, moves the movement away from a labelling of it as ‘descriptive’, whilst also precipitating a brief discussion of what is meant in this context by the term ‘programme music’. Roger Scruton’s assertion in his *Grove* article on programme music, that: ‘Properly speaking...programme music is music with a programme.’<sup>4</sup> – is a statement which poses all sorts of problems when one considers the issues surrounding the ‘validity’ of Mahler’s programmes. Theodor Adorno rejects the idea that any of Mahler’s music can be ‘pinned down’:

Inadequate as thematic analysis is to the content of Mahler’s symphonies – an analysis which misses the music’s substance in its preoccupation with procedure – no more sufficient would be the attempt to pin down, in the jargon of authenticity, the statement put forward by the music. To try to grasp such a statement directly as something represented by the music would be to assign Mahler to the sphere of overt or tacit programme music, which he early resisted and which has subsequently become plainly invalid. Ideas that are treated, depicted, or deliberately advanced by a work of art are not its ideas but materials...<sup>5</sup>

Adorno here defines what he perceives to be programme music as music with a clear-cut ‘statement’, and claims that Mahler’s music cannot be understood in such a way – a statement which neatly returns the discussion to the Franklin’s assertion that the *Adagio* of the Third Symphony does not exemplify a programmatic narrative. As such, the *Adagio* is most accurately described by Beethoven’s thoughts on his own Sixth Symphony (The Pastoral) cited in Scruton’s article: “‘mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerey” (‘more the expression of feeling than painting’).<sup>6</sup> This discussion more than anything, however, serves to emphasise the unsatisfactory nature of terms such as ‘programme music’ and ‘absolute music’, and suggests that in this context, it is best to use such terms carefully, and to explain exactly what is meant by each usage.

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<sup>3</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 77.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. (trans. Edmund Jephcott). *Mahler: A Music Physiognomy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Page 1.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Scruton. "Programme music." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/22394> (accessed July 17, 2012).

In Mahler's various programmes for the Third Symphony, the *Adagio* is entitled 'What Love Tells Me' *consistently*; a notable point when considered in the context of the other movement titles, most of which are subject to alteration during the process of composition. It is not always positioned as the sixth movement, however – Mahler's first 'programme' places it third, moving to become the sixth by the time of an 1895 letter to Fritz Löhr, in which Mahler enclosed a separate sheet detailing the individual movements of the symphony. Crucially, however, the *Adagio* was not yet the *finale* – it preceded a troublesome seventh movement which had been titled '*Das himmlische Leben*' ('The Heavenly Life'), but which Mahler chose to re-name 'What the child tells me', before dropping the movement altogether (it would later be used as the *finale* of the Fourth Symphony). Peter Franklin claims that:

The *himmlische Leben* song of 1892 had become superfluous and confusing as a conclusion. Mahler's developing conception had drawn it into the symphony as, in a sense, musically generative *of* some of it.<sup>7</sup>

This has a number of implications, particularly when considered in the context of Mahler's own comments about the final movements, found in the aforementioned letter to Fritz Löhr, part of which it is worth reproducing here:

My new Symphony will take approximately 1½ hours – it is all in grand symphonic form.

The emphasis on my personal experiences (that is, what things tell me) corresponds to the peculiar ideas embodied in the whole work. II-V inclusive are meant to express the hierarchy of organisms, which I herewith list as follows:

II. Was d. Blumen m.e. [What the flowers tell me]

III. W. d. Tiere m. e. [What the animals tell me]

IV. W. d. Nacht m. e. (human beings) [What the night tells me]

V. W. d. Morgenglocken m. e. (angels) the last two with words and singing. [What the morning bells tell me]

VI. 'W. m. d. Liebe erzählt' [What love tells me], a summary of

my feelings towards all creatures, which develops not without deeply painful spiritual involvement, which, however, is gradually resolved into blissful confidence: *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. Finally, 'd. h. L.' ['*Das himmlische Leben*' – 'Heavenly Life'] (VII), which, however, I have decided to entitle: 'Was mir das Kind erzählt'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 51.

<sup>8</sup> GM to FL: *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 164.

The most striking aspect of this ordering of movements is the written proof that ‘What Love Tells Me’ was not originally intended as the culmination of the symphony. Whilst this may seem rather obvious, the consequences of this knowledge are profound – it is difficult, in the light of this letter, to agree with the argument posited by scholars such as de La Grange that the movement ‘What Love Tells Me’ is programmatically ‘about’ God. That is – until one considers a letter Mahler wrote to Anna von Mildenburg in 1896, in which he says:

You would like to know ‘what love tells me’? Dearest Annerl, love tells me very beautiful things! And when love speaks to me now it always talks about you! But the love in my symphony is one different from what you suppose...It is an attempt to show the summit, the highest level from which the world can be surveyed. I could equally well call the movement something like: ‘What God tells me!’ And this in the sense that God can, after all, only be comprehended as ‘love’. And so my work is a musical poem that goes through all the stages of evolution, step by step. It begins with inanimate Nature and progresses to God’s love!<sup>9</sup>

The rather personal first two sentences, which are reminders of Mahler’s affair with the addressee, have been included in the above quotation purely to demonstrate what the *Adagio* is *not* – that is: romantic love. In the letter, Mahler refers to love as ‘the highest level from which the world can be surveyed’, and posits an understanding of love which seems to offer the term as a synonym for God. Interestingly, in the translation of the letter used above, taken from Knud Martner’s edition of ‘selected’ letters (translated by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser), Mahler writes that he could ‘equally well’ have titled the movement ‘What God tells me’, whereas in the translation preferred by Peter Franklin, taken from Herta Blaukopf’s *Gustav Mahler Briefe*<sup>10</sup>, that phrase is rendered as ‘I could almost call this movement “What God tells me!”’<sup>11</sup> – the term ‘equally well’ implies that Mahler simply took an aesthetic choice as to the ‘name’ of the movement, whereas the word ‘almost’ hints at the considerable discussion to be had as to why he did *not* use the term ‘God’. Furthermore, the programme cited above in the letter to

<sup>9</sup> GM to AvM: *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 188.

<sup>10</sup> *Gustav Mahler: Unbekannte Briefe* (ed. Herta Blaukopf). Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 1982.

<sup>11</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 49.

Fritz Löhr, taken from Martner's edition, states that (movements) '...II-V inclusive are meant to express the hierarchy of organisms, which I herewith list as follows...' <sup>12</sup>, whereas the same letter taken from *Gustav Mahler Briefe*, and reproduced by Peter Franklin in *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, claims (movements) '...II-IV *incl.* are to express the *successive order* of being, which I shall correspondingly express thus...' <sup>13</sup>. The difference between the fourth and the fifth movement is that between the human and the non-human; man and angels. Chapter two of this thesis discussed at some length these two movements, and, most importantly, the transition between them, showing that they function optimally when considered as a pair. The Martner translation ('II-V'), however, uses the terminology 'hierarchy of organisms', which, in light of Mahler's comment later in the same letter – '...amidst all that grows and flowers, creeps and flies, thinks and yearns, and, finally, all that of which we have only an intuitive inkling (angels – bells – transcendence).' <sup>14</sup> – would seem to suggest that Blaukopf's version of the letter, in which the '*successive order* of being' is represented by movements II-IV, is the right one. The division which this creates between movements IV and V is, however, only surface-deep. Chapter Two proves that the relationship between the two movements is a profound one, even if they are superficially divided by a categorisation of 'organic' things, and things of which 'we have only an intuitive inkling.'

In Mahler's letter to Löhr, he dedicated more space to explaining the 'meaning' of the *Adagio* than he did to any other movement – indeed, the seventh movement is treated in the letter almost an afterthought, a necessary Coda, to tie up various loose ends, if you will. Here again, however, there is a difference in translation, albeit a more subtle one: in Blaukopf's translation, the phrase '*selige Zuversicht*' is translated as

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<sup>12</sup> GM to FL: *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 164.

<sup>13</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 49.

<sup>14</sup> GM to FL: *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 164.

‘blessed faith’, whereas in Martner’s, it becomes ‘blessed confidence’. Both are valid translations, but Blaukopf’s use of a word – ‘faith’ – with significant Christian connotations activates similar, yet previously buried, connotations in the word ‘blessed’, which were perhaps not necessarily intended by Mahler. These connotations become exceedingly problematic in light of the phrase as a whole: ‘...but gradually lead through to a *selige Zuversicht*: ‘die fröhliche Wissenschaft’’. Mahler’s invocation of the title of Nietzsche’s 1882 work – whose most well-known proclamation is the ‘death of God’<sup>15</sup> – is a bold statement, and one which presumes Mahler’s extensive knowledge of both the content of Nietzsche’s book, but also its contemporary importance. Blaukopf’s decision to translate *Zuversicht* as ‘faith’, is, therefore, only logical if all one considers is the original name for the seventh movement – *Das himmlische Leben*. In this context, a reading of the *Adagio* as some sort of personal spiritual journey, a self-examination, as it were, or, better – an evaluation of those things the protagonist – Mahler – has been ‘told’ over the course of movements II-IV, is appropriate, as there is a further progression, to heaven. Read like this, the *Adagio* becomes a kind of intermediate stage in which man comes to terms with himself, before beginning to approach (painfully) God, whose dominion is represented by the seventh movement. There is a problem with this idea, however, which is the renaming of the seventh movement. In calling it ‘What the Child Told Me’, Mahler does two things. Firstly, he emphasises the naïveté of the view of heaven he suggests in the movement (including through his use of text), and secondly he ‘erects a signpost’ for the listener, pointing firmly in the direction of Nietzsche.

To take the issue of naïveté first, Theodor Adorno is in no doubt as to the nature of the seventh movement, albeit discussed in the context of the fourth symphony:

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<sup>15</sup> Book III of ‘The Gay Science’: ‘*New battles*. – After Buddha was dead, they still showed his shadow in a cave for centuries – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow. – And we – we must still defeat his shadow as well.’ ‘Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. Bernard Williams), *Nietzsche: The Gay Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Page 109.’

A passage from the text of the *Wunderhorn* song “*Der Schildwache Nachtlied*,” in the magnificently dissonant middle section of arching wide-spanned intervals, runs: “An Gottes Segen ist alles gelegen! Wer’s glauben tut! Wer’s glauben tut!” (“God’s grace takes care of everything. Who believes that? Who believes that?”) – which comments on the image of blessedness with which the symphony ends. It paints paradise in rustic anthropomorphous colors to give notice that it does not exist...With the sad and risible intricacies of a rudimentary development the music unmistakably dims a paradise that it keeps pristine only when itself producing heavenly strains.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, Adorno suggests that, rather like the *Urlicht* of the Second Symphony, the seventh movement of the Third Symphony/finale of the Fourth, seeks, through evoking a clichéd (or: naïve) image of heaven, to draw attention to the insincerity of this depiction. Adorno’s reading of this movement is a pessimistic one – he concludes his consideration of the Fourth Symphony with the words:

The phantasmagoria of the transcendent landscape [evoked by the finale] is at once posited by it and negated. Joy remains unattainable, and no transcendence is left but that of yearning.<sup>17</sup>

Adorno briefly discusses some of the implications of the text set in this movement, but does not elaborate at any great length, something which cannot be said for Carl Niekerk. Niekerk’s argument is underpinned by his assertion that the Fourth Symphony is ultimately based upon *humor*, but claims more specifically that the finale ‘...explores the tension between two levels of articulation, the inconsistency of a Christian concept of heaven.’<sup>18</sup> This view would disagree with the proposition that the movement is naïve; as Niekerk says, ‘It is a rather bizarre sort of innocence that would embrace the sometimes very violent imagery in the poem.’<sup>19</sup> Niekerk’s attempt at reconciling the image of the child in the finale of the Fourth with some of the imagery, both musical and textual, contained therein (one thinks particularly of the slaughtering of the ox) is a convincing one, and one which re-introduces Nietzschean ideas. The culmination of his argument is reproduced below, at length:

<sup>16</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. (trans. Edmund Jephcott). *Mahler: A Music Physiognomy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Page 56/7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Niekerk, Carl, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 121.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* at 119.



“Das himmlische Leben” shares with Nietzsche’s philosophical agenda a profound scepticism, not only towards Christianity’s normative claims, but also regarding the motives underlying religion in general...The Fourth Symphony’s final movement offers a rather playful version of Nietzsche’s criticism of Christianity and a complete irreverence toward its professed norms and values. It draws the ultimate conclusion from Nietzsche’s insight that “only as an *aesthetic phenomenon*” can we make sense of the world and of our existence...If our values are nothing but imaginary constructions or wishful fantasies, then we may as well try to indulge in these fantasies which also embracing the materiality of life, instead of mourning certainties that we, in hindsight, never possessed. I would interpret the fact that Mahler attributes this attitude to a child as a statement that we are dealing not necessarily with “innocence” but rather with a more authentic attitude toward life: and attitude that intuitively understands the big questions of life better than after it has been indoctrinated by religious or philosophical doctrines, and that combines such an understanding with an ability to enjoy life in freedom in spite of its many vicissitudes.<sup>20</sup>

This conclusion applies equally well to the movement individually as it does to the Fourth Symphony as a whole. Niekerk’s use of terms such as ‘irreverence’ and ‘playfulness’ are clues as to why the movement was eventually dropped from the Third Symphony – it is likely that Mahler felt the movement was foreign to the overall tone of the Third Symphony, that, whilst it undoubtedly had important things to say, its superficially light-hearted style would be so out-of-keeping with the rest of the work that any consideration by the listener over and above its stylistic features was unlikely; as such, it would fit better in a symphony described by Mahler in an early plan as a “Symphonie humoresque.”<sup>21</sup>

If, therefore, the original seventh movement of the Third Symphony is quite so *meaningful*, then the decision to drop it has significant consequences on the remainder of the symphony – not least that the *Adagio*, which, Mahler states in the letter reproduced on p.73, is about *his* feelings to all creatures, and *his* spiritual journey toward the enigmatic *selige Zuversicht*. For the seventh movement to then follow suggests that the *selige Zuversicht* achieved in the *Adagio* is ‘in God’ – that is, a ‘blessed faith’ in the Christian God is the outcome. The content of the seventh movement proceeds, though, to mock such an outcome, hinting that such a ‘confidence’

<sup>20</sup> Niekerk, Carl, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 112/3.

<sup>21</sup> Zychowicz, James L. *Mahler’s Fourth Symphony*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Page 37.

(or: ‘faith’) is misplaced, ideas fully in line with Nietzsche’s thinking as espoused primarily in *TGS*. In removing the seventh movement, Mahler alters the culmination of the symphony from an example of what *not* to resort to (adherence to religious dogma), to a working through of Nietzschean ideas as diverse as those espoused in *BT*, *TSZ* and *TGS*.

This is, therefore, the moment to leave *Das himmlische Leben* – having recognised both its significance, but, more importantly, the significance of its removal – a recognition which must be allowed to impact on subsequent discussion of the *Adagio* in its revised role as finale.

### **The Adagio: Climax and Goal**

Mahler’s own comments about the *Adagio*, briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, are certainly the most logical way to begin a consideration of it; perhaps his most well-known proclamation on it is to say: ‘In the Adagio, everything is resolved into quiet “being”; the Ixion-wheel of appearances has at last been brought to a standstill.’<sup>22</sup> This is a telling comment; the imagery within it is quite powerful. The term ‘Ixion-wheel’ is derived from Greek mythology – specifically the fiery winged wheel which Zeus ordered Ixion to be strapped to, upon discovering Ixion’s less-than-subtle intentions with regard to his wife, Hera. The wheel spins forever across the heavens, and only stopped temporarily when Orpheus played his lyre while attempting to rescue Eurydice from the underworld. The imagery is complex, and to what extent Mahler intended to evoke it is questionable, but it is surely appropriate to suggest that the *Adagio* may be directly compared to the music of Orpheus’ lyre (perhaps even going so far as to recognise the connection between the lyre as a stringed instrument and the dominance of the strings in the finale), insofar as it stills the tumult of the previous

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<sup>22</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber Music Ltd. 1980. Page 76.

movements. This is, of course, where the metaphor begins to break down – Ixion’s wheel stopped but temporarily during Orpheus’ music, whilst Mahler’s *Adagio* is very much a finale, after which one is not expected to return to the clamour of the earlier movements (it is possible, though less-than convincing, to argue that Mahler may have recognised the nature of his work as a finite artwork (in performance), and as such recognised and incorporated the listener’s return to the clamour of ‘life’ afterwards. This is persuasive only if one considers the finale as fundamentally Schopenhauerean; an idea which will be discussed later in this chapter.) Nevertheless, it is an appropriate parallel to draw, and one which has significance beyond that of a throwaway phrase.

Peter Franklin points out that:

His own image of the movement seems to have been that of a lens hovering above the rest of the symphony and gathering the rays of an all-enfolding eternal love, as if in answer to the manuscript’s epigraph prayer...<sup>23</sup>

The ‘epigraph prayer’ Franklin refers to is found in the 1896 manuscript score, positioned just before the *Adagio*, and reads:

Father, look upon my wounds  
Let no creature be lost.

This is, Carl Niekerk points out, a mis-remembrance of a number of lines in the *Wunderhorn* song ‘*Erlösung*’ (‘Redemption’), perhaps the most significant consequence of which is the alteration from the original ‘sinner’, to ‘creature’ in the second line of the above translation. Nevertheless, for Mahler to invoke the name of the Father at the beginning of the movement is a significant step. There are strong parallels here, however, with the finale of the Second Symphony, in which Mahler’s theology deviates markedly from established Christian dogma – the following is taken from one of Mahler’s programmes for the Second Symphony:

The earth quakes, the graves burst open, the dead arise and stream on in endless procession. The great and the little ones of the earth – kinds and beggars, righteous and godless – all press on – the cry for mercy and forgiveness strikes fearfully on

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<sup>23</sup> Franklin, Peter. ‘A Stranger’s Story: Programmes, Politics and Mahler’s Third Symphony’. In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, 171-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Page 184.

our ears. The wailing rises higher – our senses desert us, consciousness dies at the approach of the eternal spirit. The

‘Last Trump’

is heard – the trumpets of the Apocalypse ring out; in the eerie silence that follows we can just catch the distant, barely audible song of a nightingale, a last tremulous echo of earthly life! A chorus of saints and heavenly beings softly breaks forth:

‘Thou shalt arise, surely thou shalt arise.’ Then appears the glory of God! A wondrous, soft light penetrates us to the heart – all is holy calm!

And behold – it is no judgement – there are no sinners, no just. None is great, none is small. There is no punishment and no rewards.

An overwhelming love lightens our being. We know and are.<sup>24</sup>

This is an account of the Day of Judgement, or so it seems until the penultimate phrase, when it becomes clear that Mahler has deviated from the conventional understanding, and offers a revised theory, in which judgement plays no part. The exhortation of the *Adagio* of the Third Symphony’s epigraph is, therefore, directly related to, or perhaps even a development upon, the idea posited in the Second – Mahler, rather than ‘misremembering’ the phrase ‘Let no sinner be lost’, perhaps chooses to adapt it, further drawing attention away from the Christian hierarchy of those who are saved and those who are not, as well as trying to negate the idea of a life lived by an arbitrary set of rules, the result of which is either reward or punishment, whilst endeavouring to use terminology which would not too far alienate the observer. Mahler claimed (and it is somewhat ambiguous as to whether he was referring to a particular movement specifically or the symphony as a whole) that: ‘Over and above it all, *eternal love* acts within us – as the rays come together in a focal point’<sup>25</sup>, an idea which Peter Franklin connected directly to the epigraph prayer, suggesting that the *Adagio* functions as that focal point of eternal love. Up to this point, therefore, it would seem that Mahler is at once trying to reject a conventionally Christian concept of how to come to terms with life, whilst also suggesting a more appropriate way of doing so. The line which follows Mahler’s discussion of the ‘motto’ of the finale in a letter, however, muddies the waters

<sup>24</sup> Mahler, Alma (ed. Donald Mitchell). *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*. London: John Murray Ltd., 1973. Page 213.

<sup>25</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 49.

somewhat: ‘It is the last stage of differentiation: *God!* Or, if you like, *Overman*.’<sup>26</sup> This comment, in which Mahler appears to suggest that Nietzsche’s idea of the *Übermensch* is not all that far removed from that of a Christian God (indeed, that the terms are interchangeable) must surely be one of the sources for the many misguided opinions that:

“What Love Tells Me”, then, like its immediate predecessor [the fifth movement - *Es sungen drei Engel*], renounces the Nietzschean alternative [in favour of ‘the victory asserted in “Es sungen drei Engel”’], but this time on its own turf.<sup>27</sup>

Niekerk points out that:

...paradoxical as it may seem, attempts to reconcile Christianity with Nietzsche’s Zarathustra were not uncommon around 1900. The prevailing argument was that Nietzsche’s philosophy would allow humankind to return to a rejuvenated, more authentic, and more vital form of Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

This comment, therefore, would appear to betray a critical misunderstanding on Mahler’s part – that Nietzsche’s idea of the *Übermensch* is closely related to the Christian concept of God – a misunderstanding which would make it very difficult to argue that the Third Symphony in any way rejects Christian dogma in favour of a pure-Nietzschean alternative. Jeremy Barham points out one possible explanation for this, suggesting that:

Edward Reilly goes further and casts doubt on Mahler’s equating of ‘God’ with ‘*Übermensch*’ in a letter of 1896, considering it more likely to be ‘an ironic comment which suggests that Mahler knew the views of the recipient of the letter’<sup>29</sup>

Niekerk’s remedy for this situation (and it is perhaps more convincing than Reilly’s above) is to draw attention to the prologue of *TSZ*, in which the idea of the *Übermensch* is first introduced:

*I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome.  
What have you done to overcome him?*

<sup>26</sup> *Gustav Mahler: Unbekannte Briefe* (ed. Herta Blaukopf). Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 1982. Page 127.

<sup>27</sup> Knapp, Raymond. *Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in Mahler’s Re-Cycled Songs*, Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Page 31/2.

<sup>28</sup> Niekerk, Carl, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 112.

<sup>29</sup> Barham, Jeremy M., *Mahler’s Third Symphony and the Philosophy of Gustav Fechner: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Criticism, Analysis and Interpretation*, Ph.D. Diss: University of Surrey, 1998. Page 400.

All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man?

What is the ape to men? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the Superman: a laughing stock of a painful embarrassment.<sup>30</sup>

Niekerk emphasises the Darwinian nature of the language here – that the *Übermensch* relates to ‘man’ as ‘man’ does to ‘ape’: that is, an evolutionary relationship, with each level representing an ‘improvement’ of sorts. This language, he argues, sits well with Mahler’s step-by-step representation of being, from the flowers through to man. The *Adagio* is Mahler’s own take on Nietzsche’s somewhat vague ideas not of *by what* man is to be transcended, but of *how* man is to overcome himself (‘The very openness of the concept leaves the recipient ample space to (re)design the term, to fill its semantic contours according to her/his own ideas.’<sup>31</sup>) – for Mahler, that means by overcoming ‘...humans’ individualism and their alienation from nature.’<sup>32</sup>, understood not as something ‘other’, but as the ‘object of a subjective experience.’<sup>33</sup> Re-union with nature, as Niekerk suggests is Mahler’s meaning, can be achieved primarily through emotion, and more particularly – Love. Ultimately, man must become aware of its place *within* nature, not as its goal. In a way, Niekerk suggests, Mahler is poking fun at the teleological structure of the Third Symphony, (and, necessarily, this attitude as manifested in the Christian faith), using the *Adagio* to collect the aforementioned rays of ‘eternal love’ – the love of every creature and understanding of mankind’s place in creation, *not* as something divinely privileged or somehow ‘special’, but simply just another facet of that creation, as important as the ‘Flowers in the Meadow’, but no more so – and in doing so demonstrates the path not to redemption, but to the status of *Übermensch*. Franklin expresses this slightly differently, claiming that by using the

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<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 41/2.

<sup>31</sup> Niekerk, Carl, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 113.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

*Adagio* as a form of ‘lens’ by which to collect rays of eternal love, Mahler is, through the creative act of its production, taking the role of God for himself:

Such music [the final few pages of the score] inspires rather than expresses reverential awe. By thus becoming God, Mahler redefines the deity as Nietzschean *Übermensch*: as the highest mode of human awareness; a climax rather than a transcendence of conscious Being.<sup>34</sup>

This idea of a ‘climax’ – a ‘climax of Being’, if you will – is vital; this terminology simply reinforces the necessity of recognising that the ‘goal’ is not a transcendent one, it does not belong to the ‘other’, but is rather one which is ‘natural’ (that is – of nature) and worldly. His use of the term ‘God’ is thus explained perhaps by an inability to let go completely of the terminology of the ‘old’ system (the system in which he was steeped); furthermore, it is not surprising that a man who takes such liberties with established dogma (see the finale of the Second Symphony) may take a term such as ‘God’, and use it in a less-than-conventional manner.

If, then, ‘climax’ is an appropriate term to use to describe the *Adagio*, the question becomes whether the movement as a whole is regarded as climactic, or whether the ‘climax of Being’ is achieved at the end of the movement; in other words, is the climax as teleological goal of the whole symphony manifested *by* the finale, or *at the end* of the finale? Jens Malte Fischer’s thoughts on the *Adagio*, which open this chapter, consider the movement as a whole to be relatively static in these terms, although his inclusion of the word ‘seemingly’ before his description of it as having an ‘unshakeable belief in truth, beauty and goodness’ would seem to allow for a degree of disagreement. Fischer is well advised, through his use of the term ‘seemingly’, to allow a discussion to develop here, however, as it is quite clear that, whilst its manner may be relatively understated, the majority of the *Adagio* is not as content as it seems – there is still a discourse to illuminate, Mahler suggests.

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<sup>34</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 76.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the finale is that it does not set a text. Sitting, in Mahler's oeuvre, between two symphonies that do set text in the finale, the absence of it becomes more significant, particularly in light of Mahler's own comment that:

Whenever I plan a large musical structure, I always come to a point where I have to resort to 'the word' as a vehicle for my musical idea. – It must have been pretty much the same for Beethoven in his Ninth, except that the right materials were not yet available in his day.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, in the original seven-movement version of the Third, the finale did set a text, as has been discussed at length in this chapter; for Mahler to drop that movement, and be content with an instrumental movement as the 'new' finale is telling – he must have been content with the movement's message without recourse to the word. Peter Franklin cites this lack of text as evidence that:

...it was Mahler's hope to produce a resolution that was redeeming, a homage to the Romantic notion of 'Classical' music, explicitly *interpreted* in programmatic privacy as an idealized goal where in public it might be left as a mysteriously numinous manifestation of some 'given', and describable, perhaps, only by that all too meaningful word 'absolute'...<sup>36</sup>

Franklin argues here that, for the listening audience, the lack of text – the seemingly 'absolute' nature of the music – is intended to create a degree of uncertainty about its meaning. He goes on to say that:

...a provisional clarification of the music's private meaning for Mahler may finally be approached only by questioning the precise nature of the 'blessed faith' which he claimed the movement attained and to which he gave the explicitly Nietzschean name 'Die fröhliche Wissenschaft'.<sup>37</sup>

This idea implies that the movement's 'meaning' for Mahler need not necessarily be the meaning which is interpreted by the listening audience, who might perhaps be content with appreciating it as 'a mysteriously numinous manifestation of some 'given'' – that 'given' being interpreted by most, presumably, as something to do with transcendence and the Christian God. For Mahler to be content with his audience essentially

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<sup>35</sup> GM to ASI: Mahler, Alma (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*. London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 212.

<sup>36</sup> Franklin, Peter. 'A Stranger's Story: Programmes, Politics and Mahler's Third Symphony'. In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, 171-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Page 184.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



misinterpreting the meaning of his work is unlikely, and for him to have expended significant effort in composing a movement which can, essentially, present two opposing ideas is even less so – but of course, a discussion of Mahler’s ‘meaning’ is never clear cut, even insofar as how to interpret the very term ‘meaning’.

Text or no text, however, there is certainly a discourse, and it is through understanding that discourse that an understanding of Mahler’s intention for the movement is approached – an understanding designed for *all*, not just the privileged few.

Raymond Knapp illustrates how he believes this manifests itself:

Thus, Mahler structures his sixth movement around one of the characteristic tropes of absolute music, in which threats to an opening condition are ultimately put aside by an irresistibly enhanced return whose manner and culminating position assert its claim to the status of eternal truth. “What Love Tells Me”, then, like its immediate predecessor, renounces the Nietzschean alternative, but this time on its own turf.<sup>38</sup>

The final sentence of this quotation, the reader may remember, was used some pages previously to illustrate an ‘incorrect’ assertion – that Mahler in this movement ‘renounces’ Nietzsche, in favour of a more conventionally Christian alternative – but Knapp’s observations about the way in which the movement unfolds are so accurate that, despite reaching the opposite conclusion from that which is being argued here, they must still be included. The ‘opening condition’ which Knapp refers to can be convincingly described as the thematic material of the first eight bars. This material is perhaps some of Mahler’s most simplistic of the whole symphony. Composed only for strings (albeit split seven ways), Mahler scores a theme which can certainly be described as ‘affirmative’<sup>39</sup>, and which is, by any measurement, conventional – that is, four bars of antecedent material followed by four bars of consequent, culminating in an imperfect cadence (See Ex. 7):

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<sup>38</sup> Knapp, Raymond. *Symphonic Metamorphoses: Subjectivity and Alienation in Mahler’s Re-Cycled Songs*, Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003. Page 31/2.

<sup>39</sup> As Jens Malte Fischer does, reproduced in the quotation that opens this chapter.

**Langsam. Ruhevoll. Empfundenes.**

G-Saite. - D-Saite. -

Sehr gebunden sehr ausdrucksvoll gesungen.

1. Violine. (ohne Dämpfer) *pp* *Sehr gebunden.* *immer G-Saite.*

2. Violine. (ohne Dämpfer) *pp* *G-Saite. sehr gebunden*

Viola geth. (ohne Dämpfer) *pp* *sehr gebunden*

Violoncell geth. (ohne Dämpfer) *pp* *sehr gebunden* *pp molto espress.* *pp*

Contrabass. (ohne Dämpfer) *pp* *sehr gebunden*

Ex. 7

The movement consists of (at times quite strongly delineated) sections that are reasonably identifiable, particularly from the score, but also to the listening ear. To call the movement an example of ‘theme and variations’ is, however, too simplistic, for that is not really the point. There are two reasons for this:

Firstly, it is not so much the musical qualities of the theme that are of importance, rather, it is the ‘aura’ created by Mahler’s writing which is of prime significance. As such, subsequent sections may or may not ‘develop’ musical ideas present in the theme: it matters little, for the interest is located in subsequent sections’ relationships with the ‘feelings’ evoked by the opening. Such a statement, quite obviously, moves the *Adagio* away from a definition as ‘absolute’ music, which, although possibly a more loaded term even than ‘programme’ music, is appropriate here: a piece of music which is less concerned with *what* the music does than with *why* and what the effect of it is cannot be termed ‘absolute’, even under the broadest definition of the term.

Secondly, it is necessary to recognise the presence of something ‘against’ – that is, a voice which threatens the ‘opening condition’, and against which that condition must fight:

An all-too-human, heart-on-sleeve quality was in fact deliberately imparted by him to the *Adagio* theme at Fig.1, where the ‘peace’ (*Ruhevoll*) of the chorale-like opening music is disturbed by rapid crescendo/diminuendo markings that presage

the wide range of increasingly frenetic directions associated with derivations of the Fig. 1 theme later in the movement. Ripe for narrative disruption, it suggests a stream of precariously aspiring consciousness whose confidence is repeatedly lost in dramatic crises.<sup>40</sup>

In a separate article, Franklin describes the source of these ‘dramatic crises’ as:

...a complementary element that can threaten the stability of the chorale-like opening theme, whilst also imploring its benediction: setting up a dialogue between the divine and the human, the *Übermensch* and the *Mensch*.<sup>41</sup>

He goes on to bravely suggest that the ‘complementary’ element (an interesting choice of word, meant simply in the sense of necessity: one cannot have an argument without an opposing viewpoint, for example) ‘...is perhaps implicit within the main theme itself, which is presented as an idealization of human, *singing* euphony.’<sup>42</sup> – a reference to the opening’s chorale-like nature. This ‘argument’, which pervades the movement, Franklin claims, is the path to the climax.

William McGrath’s reading of the *Adagio* is that it is fundamentally Schopenhauerean, rather than Nietzschean; he claims that ‘...in his Third, Mahler felt he had captured the will-less serenity that his predecessor had so ardently sought and so rarely found.’<sup>43</sup>, referring to the aesthetic and religious experiences which Schopenhauer had claimed allowed the ‘Will’ (to live) to deny its own nature, and as such allow the individual temporary release from the fundamentally painful nature of existence. He cites a passage from *The World as Will and Representation*, in which Schopenhauer employs the terminology of the Ixion wheel as discussed some paragraphs previous, which he claims accurately depicts the *Adagio* – a statement which, at least for the first few bars of the movement, it is difficult to disagree with:

Then all at once the peace, always sought but always escaping us on that first path of willing, comes to us of its own accord, and all is well with us. It is the painless state, prized by Epicurus as the highest good and as the state of the gods; for that

<sup>40</sup> Franklin, Peter. ‘A Stranger’s Story: Programmes, Politics and Mahler’s Third Symphony’. In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, 171-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Page 184.

<sup>41</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 71.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 156.

moment we are delivered from the miserable pressure of the will. We celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing; the wheel of Ixion stands still.<sup>44</sup>

McGrath does, however, recognise the presence of a ‘complementary’ element in the movement, which he attempts to justify by recourse to Mahler’s comment that the movement was ‘...a summary of my feelings towards all creatures, which develops not without deeply painful spiritual involvement, which, however, is gradually resolved into blissful confidence: *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*.’<sup>45</sup> – the implication being that ‘even on this highest level of being, suffering and struggle are not absent.’<sup>46</sup> McGrath proceeds to trace what he terms the ‘Will motif’, and its complementary theme, the ‘Love motif’ through the movement, until the ‘Love motif’ appears to triumph, culminating in

...a climax in which the love motif in both its initial and inverted form is developed by the entire orchestra in constantly increasing intensity until it concludes with a vastly altered statement of the will motif...<sup>47</sup>

Remarkably, McGrath refers to Nietzsche just once, and even then only in passing, in the course of his entire discussion of the *Adagio*, despite quoting Mahler’s letter in which he mentions *TGS*. McGrath’s focus is firmly on Schopenhauer, and in his determination to prove that the final movement is a Schopenhauerean denial of the Will, he neglects to explore any possible Nietzschean connotations. Nevertheless, this reading of the *Adagio* does permit it to act as a form of ‘climax’, even if that climax is interpreted by McGrath in a non-Nietzschean sense.

Whilst McGrath takes an almost Wagnerian approach to naming leitmotifs and tracing their use in the *Adagio*, such an approach leads to a worryingly clear-cut (and un-Nietzschean) conclusion. One is reminded of the parenthesised discussion some pages previously of the possibility of the *Adagio* being simply a *temporary* moment of *selige Zuversicht* – an idea which correlates rather better with a Schopenhauerean reading of

<sup>44</sup> Schopenhauer, Arthur (trans. E.F.J.Payne). *The World as Will and Representation – Vol. I*, New York: Dover Publications, 1969. Page 196.

<sup>45</sup> GM to FL: *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 164.

<sup>46</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 151.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid* at 153.

the movement than it does with a Nietzschean one, particularly when one considers Mahler's use of the 'Ixion-wheel' analogy, where the spinning of the wheel – a metaphor for the striving will, according to Schopenhauer – is stopped only by the music of Orpheus' lyre, to begin again once the music ceases. Persuasive as this conclusion may sound, a more detailed consideration of the opposing elements within the *Adagio* soon begins to return the movement into the realm of Nietzsche.

The idea of the opposition between Apollonian and Dionysian elements in art was discussed at some length in the context of Nietzsche's first publication – *BT* – in the first chapter of this thesis. Nietzsche believed that the ideal balance of this duality was epitomised in the music-dramas of the ancient Greeks, and had not been balanced since – until, that is, the work of Richard Wagner. It must be stressed that not only did Nietzsche's thinking on this topic change radically following the souring of relations with Wagner, but *BT* is in no way representative of what may be described as a 'pillar' of Nietzsche's philosophy; as was emphasised in Chapter One, Nietzsche had no 'system' to further – in other words, there were no pillars, just a developing series of ideas. Nevertheless, the 'constellation' of Nietzschean influences can certainly be said to include ideas derived from *BT*.

To remove from Nietzsche's discussion of the opposition of Apollonian and Dionysian elements in art, for a moment, the very terms 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian', leaves simply the idea of 'opposition'. This may seem relatively meaningless, removed from its context, but, as a concept, 'opposition' is enormously important within Mahler's music, and to identify examples of it, particularly in the *Adagio*, is very quickly to recognise the Nietzschean implications of those examples. The imagery that scholars such as Raymond Knapp and Peter Franklin use, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is that of 'argument', or 'attack'. Their basic premise (even if it serves as a foundation for divergent arguments) is that, in the *Adagio* there is a fundamental state (the first eight

bars) that is challenged by (to borrow Franklin's term) a 'complementary' idea. The first eight bars is, as has been stated, undeniably tranquil – what it 'represents' has been pored over above, and is, at this stage, not particularly relevant. Nietzsche, in *BT*, attempts to describe the nature of the 'Apolline' through the metaphor of the *dream*:

The beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is a consummate artist, is the precondition of all visual art, and indeed, as we shall see, of an important amount of poetry. We take pleasure in the immediate apprehension of form, all shapes speak to us, and nothing is indifferent or unnecessary.<sup>48</sup>

This description, were one to remove the references to 'visual art' and 'poetry', would certainly be applicable to the opening eight bars of the *Adagio*. Those two qualifiers, however, are not as troublesome as might first be thought, for whilst it cannot be argued that the eight bars are anything but music, Mahler, not known for his structural conventionality, chooses to evoke a chorale through his writing. No note value is shorter than a crotchet, it is predominantly homorhythmic, and its structure consists of an antecedent and consequent section. The chorale is so conventional, therefore, that it may almost be considered a plastic art thanks to its clearly defined characteristics and boundaries – it is almost pretending to be such. Nietzsche goes on:

Indeed, it might be said of Apollo that the unshaken faith in that *principium*...[has] found [its] most sublime expression in him, and we might even describe Apollo as the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*, from whose gestures and looks all the delight, wisdom and beauty of 'illusion' speak to us.<sup>49</sup>

It is becoming clear, therefore, that the opening eight bars of the *Adagio* cannot be considered to be the 'ideal', if this closely Nietzschean reading is to be followed. The above implies that Mahler's chorale is an 'illusion' – a dream which should precipitate the following response:

Thus the man who is responsive to artistic stimuli reacts to the reality of dreams as does the philosopher to the reality of existence; he observes closely, and he enjoys his observation: for it is out of these images that he interprets life, out of these processes that he trains himself for life.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner), *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 15.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid* at 16.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid* at 15.

Through these eight bars, man is experiencing the *illusion* of how things are, how things necessarily need to be – this is the ‘coping mechanism’ for life. This ‘coping mechanism’ is manifested by the *principium individuationis* – put simply: man copes with the nature of being by convincing himself that he is separate from it – Schopenhauer’s imagery is particularly effective in describing this idea, as Nietzsche points out:

And thus we might say of Apollo what Schopenhauer said of man caught up in the veil of Maya (*The World as Will and Representation* I [p.352]):

‘Just as the boatman sits in his little boat, trusting to his fragile craft in a stormy sea which, boundless in every direction, rises and falls in howling, mountainous waves, so in the midst of a world full of suffering the individual man calmly sits, supported by and trusting the *principium individuationis*.’<sup>51</sup>

If, then, the first eight bars of the *Adagio* are pure Apolline, representing nothing but the dream-like state in which man most of the time exists, attention must turn to identifying the ‘opposing’ idea – the Dionysiac. Peter Franklin, in a quotation that has been reproduced in this chapter<sup>52</sup>, suggests that at Fig. 1 of the score (that is, nine bars in – see Ex. 8):

...the ‘peace’ (*Ruhevoll*) of the chorale-like opening music is disturbed by rapid crescendo/diminuendo markings that presage the wide range of increasingly frenetic directions associated with derivations of the Fig. 1 theme later in the movement.<sup>53</sup>



Ex. 8

<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner), *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 16.

<sup>52</sup> See p.91/2 above.

<sup>53</sup> Franklin, Peter. ‘A Stranger’s Story: Programmes, Politics and Mahler’s Third Symphony’. In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, 171-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Page 184.

This disturbance is hugely subtle, although it is notable that the melody, which is now predominantly made up of quavers, is to be found in the upper register of the ‘Cello, a register which is renowned for its somewhat tense, strident quality. Franklin’s description is appropriate, however – these new qualities introduced into the section beginning at Fig. 1 are only *hinting* at something, but what they hint at is profound: the Dionysiac.

Nietzsche states that in man, the Dionysiac is experienced primarily as an ‘urge’, which changes in intensity; as such, it is unsurprising that the first signs of the Dionysiac in the *Adagio* are quite subtle. His description of its manifestation and effects is powerful:

In the same passage [as reproduced above] Schopenhauer has described the tremendous *dread* that grips man when he suddenly loses his way amidst the cognitive forms of appearance, because the principle of sufficient reason, in one of its forms, seems suspended. If we add to this dread the blissful ecstasy which, prompted by the same fragmentation of the *principium individuationis*, rises up from man’s innermost core, indeed from nature, we are vouchsafed a glimpse into the nature of the *Dionysiac*...Not only is the bond between man and man sealed by the Dionysiac magic: alienated, hostile or subjugated nature, too, celebrates her reconciliation with her lost son, man.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, Nietzsche argued that exposure to ‘neat’ Dionysianism, as it were, was undesirable – impossible to tolerate – and as such, a ‘balance’ had to be found:

Art, that is, always, even at its most Dionysiac, possesses form, and thus up to a point falsifies its subject-matter...But it needs to perform this falsification, for otherwise we would find it unendurable.<sup>55</sup>

Nietzsche’s own imagery for this relationship is interesting:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have succeeded in perceiving directly, and not only through logical reasoning, that art derives its continuous development from the duality of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac*; just as the reproduction of species depends on the duality of the sexes, with its constant conflicts and only periodically intervening reconciliations.<sup>56</sup>

The ultimate goal of the *Adagio* may, therefore, be described as a ‘reconciliation’; but there is much ‘conflict’ to be had before that can be realised.

<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner), *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 16.

<sup>55</sup> Tanner, Michael ‘Nietzsche’. In *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Thomas, 339-435. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Page 358.

<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner), *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Page 16.



Whilst Mahler hints at the conflict to come early on in the movement, through his use of rapid (yet subtle) dynamic changes, occasional chromaticisms, and rhythmic displacement, it is not until roughly Fig. 7 that the listener receives more than a glimpse at the Dionysiac. At this point, the music becomes louder than *p* for the first time in the movement – the chord at Fig. 7 is marked *fp* (see Ex. 9), and what follows is repeated ascending scalar patterns, culminating in a chord marked *ff* at b.75, above which four horns declaim a bold repeated motif.

Ex. 9

However, the passage that follows this (Figs.9 & 10) is simply transitional material back into a passage with is strongly reminiscent of the opening chorale, albeit with occasional stirrings of the Dionysiac in the form of buried ascending scales. This is not an uncommon trait in the movement – Peter Franklin points out, in the context of Fig.1:

Twelve bars later the seraphic chorale returns, as ever it must. The movement's victory over conflictual 'development' will indeed be signalled by increasingly intense experiences of this theme's ability to return and bless us after no matter what torments.<sup>57</sup>

Whilst Franklin is arguing from a perspective foreign to a *BT*-based approach to the final movement, his observation that the chorale 'returns, as ever it must' is an important one – it must indeed return, but only until the point at which it achieves reconciliation. There

<sup>57</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 75.

are moments in the symphony where one is gifted a sense of what the final reconciliation will be like – particularly at Fig.19 – but these moments are cut short, to be replaced by yet another peaceful – Apolline – section, yet one which demonstrates more and more its striving towards the ultimate goal. Even at the movement's most 'seraphic' – Fig.26 – the trumpet melody's very otherworldliness, which puts the listener in mind of the posthorn solo in the third movement (or perhaps even the chorale at the opening of *Urlicht*: the fourth movement of the Second Symphony), is a warning of its unreality. When the melody is handed to the horns at Fig.28, one begins to sense the possibility of the reconciliation; the horns, whilst intended to be beautifully expressive at this point carry with them the (as yet unrealised) potential for majesty and a sense of profundity which it is impossible to achieve with trumpets. And yet, when the possibility of reconciliation is almost inevitable, at Fig.31, Mahler writes a diminuendo, a breath mark, and then scores a *pianissimo* chord for only strings and woodwind. Subsequently, as if from no-where, the trumpets and trombones enter, marked *ppp*, with a perfect fourth, an interval with such all-encompassing significance in this whole symphony, which introduces, remarkably, a transposed and rhythmically augmented statement of the opening chorale theme. To the accompaniment of enormous orchestral chords, and repeated timpani strikes of dominant-tonic (but scored in such a way that the interval is also an ascending perfect fourth), that chorale melody restated by the brass is subsumed into the vastness of Mahler's triumphant orchestral writing – not a *defeat* but a *reconciliation*, where the elegant Apollonian imagery of the chorale meets the Dionysian urge of mankind, manifested in Mahler's extraordinary scoring, and *becomes one*.

This account of the *Adagio* takes as its only inspiration Nietzsche's ideas in *BT*. This in itself is not a problem, and the reading which it suggests is a perfectly valid one; nevertheless, because (as has been stated above) Nietzsche's ideas do not take the form

of ‘pillars’, to achieve a fuller understanding of the *Adagio* requires a broader focus – of particular relevance is the *Übermensch*.

Discussed at length above is the idea of the *Adagio* as a ‘climax of Being’ – not a transcendent ideal, but one of the here-and-now – at once human and super-human. This fits comfortably with a discussion of the movement in *BT*-inspired terms. The ‘Dionysian magic’, Nietzsche suggests, leads not only to the bond between man and man being reinstated, but, more importantly, the bond between man and nature. In the context of the ‘natural’ vehicle which this symphony employs, a fusion of ideas here is quite probable; the reconciliation of man with nature necessitates the rejection of the *principium individuationis* – a vital process in order to achieve the status of *Übermensch*. The ‘climax’ of the movement and symphony – the final section from Fig.31 – can thus be interpreted as two distinct yet interdependent layers. The ‘reconciliation’ of the Apolline and Dionysiac fulfils Nietzsche’s specification for ‘ideal’ art, through which man comes to understand the world, but by doing so, serves as the catalyst for self-overcoming. In other words, man comes to realise the nature of things, and in doing so accepts his place within nature and the reality of *eternal recurrence*. In doing so, he fulfils all the requirements specified by Nietzsche to achieve the ultimate goal: the status of *Übermensch*. Indeed, some go further, arguing that the idea of the *Übermensch* is manifested in an even more obvious way, where Mahler’s writing is ultimately self-conscious:

The very extremity of the effect Mahler strives for heightens our sensitivity to the meaning of the symphonic concert itself as a social ritual. Its focus is a conductor who wields visible power over a body of players whose utmost effort he commands: to symbolize here the coming together of the human and the superhuman.<sup>58</sup>

Franklin here is arguing that the conductor represents the *Übermensch*, wielding power over *mensch*, represented by the orchestral players. A more useful image can be

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<sup>58</sup> Franklin, Peter. ‘A Stranger’s Story: Programmes, Politics and Mahler’s Third Symphony’. In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, 171-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Page 184.

achieved, however, if one reverses Franklin's idea. After Fig.32, the effect which Mahler creates is a very static one, and, whilst there is a diminuendo marked shortly after, the final nine bars are purposefully overwhelming. Very little movement occurs during those nine bars, and the symphony concludes with a full orchestral chord, with both a fermata and the word '*Lange*' marked over it. As such, for those final nine bars, and the last bar particularly, the conductor has comparatively little to do. Whilst there are undoubtedly the practicalities of conducting to be observed, for example, the bringing off of the orchestra, this static wall of triumphant sound suggests that, rather than the conductor epitomising the *Übermensch*, it is the orchestra. Each individual player comes together to play one chord; it is *they* who have achieved the climax of Being, corporately, whilst the figure of the conductor is transformed from that of self-appointed quasi-deity to lonely 'last man', who, ultimately, is swept up by the power of the orchestra and who has no choice but to accept his impotence. The conductor does not represent the *Übermensch*; he represents, by the end of the Third Symphony, the God who no longer lives or is necessary – the need for whom has been negated by the reconciliation of Apolline and Dionysiac and the subsequent realisation of the true nature of Being.

This chapter has served a dual purpose; firstly to investigate the misconceptions so often attributed to the *Adagio* and to consider Mahler's own thinking upon it and the original seventh movement, but then to utilise that knowledge, and study of the score, to suggest a strongly Nietzschean reading of the movement which positions it appropriately within the symphony as a whole. It may seem perverse to have considered the climax of the symphony before its very opening – however, not only was the first movement composed last, but it serves a purpose which transcends the conventional teleological layout of a large-scale symphony. It is that movement to which this thesis now turns.

## Chapter Five: Movement One – A Structural and Programmatic Failure?

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Trying, as he does, to interpret his creations after the event, he hits on all sorts of programmatic explanations.<sup>1</sup>

Natalie Bauer-Lechner in this sentence perfectly illustrates the problems facing any Mahler scholar looking to interpret the ‘meaning’ of the Third Symphony. Jens Malte Fischer elaborates further, suggesting that: ‘Particularly striking is Mahler’s fondness for loquacious explanations of his Third Symphony...’<sup>2</sup>; loquacious explanations which vary enormously in their imagery, even going so far as to contradict themselves. Bauer-Lechner above refers particularly to the first movement of the symphony, which undoubtedly represents the pinnacle of Mahler’s creative output to the point of the work’s completion, and it is this movement of the Third Symphony that this chapter considers in depth.

The first movement has an approximate running time of thirty-five minutes; Mahler feared, consequently, it would be seen as, at best, completely unintelligible and, at worst, self-indulgent bombast. In his earliest performances of the entire symphony, this movement was often programmed with the interval immediately following, presumably to give the audience time to digest what they had just heard – or perhaps simply to recuperate. Indeed, as the opening quotation of this chapter suggests, not even the composer was quite sure of the nature of that which he had created, a fact which is the inevitable reason behind the plethora of programmatic assertions which Mahler left in his wake, and which make consideration of the first movement such a

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<sup>1</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 76.

<sup>2</sup> Fischer, Jens Malte (trans. Stewart Spencer), *Gustav Mahler*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Page 276.

daunting prospect. Jeremy Barham concisely, and helpfully, takes a step back, and illuminates some key issues or pitfalls in previous considerations of this movement, with a particular focus (inevitably) on structural issues:

It is...true to say that the analyses of the movement have, with few exceptions, been dominated either by comment on the strikingly allusive nature of the music's thematic content, to the exclusion of larger formal issues; by a determination to measure the movement negatively against, or to squeeze the movement into preconceived notions of, symphonic first-movement sonata form; by programmatic considerations; or by recourse to the notion of an extreme subjectivism.<sup>3</sup>

### **Composition and Positioning**

This movement had an unusual genesis; it was composed last, and there are musical quotations from many of the other movements contained within its structure. Of course, were this movement to be the finale, a convincing argument could be made for a reading of the movement in which it serves as a focal point for all the other movements – as it is not, however, it may more appropriately be seen as the wellspring of musical ideas, developed by individual movements in the symphony's 'Part II'. Of course, this tension between interpretations of the function of the first movement is the most visible sign of the profound problem that the positioning of the movement poses. Put simply, in knowing that the first movement was, in fact, composed last, does the listener then have a responsibility to interpret the symphony as a whole differently, or should they – indeed, can they – listen to the work chronologically, ignoring the implications of the movement's position within the creative process? This is, however, a very specific question, and to broaden its scope is perhaps to allow a more constructive argument to develop – this chapter, therefore, examines both the characteristics of the first movement in isolation (insofar as this is possible), and then goes on to suggest a constructive method by which the symphony as a whole can be

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<sup>3</sup> Barham, Jeremy M., *Mahler's Third Symphony and the Philosophy of Gustav Fechner: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Criticism, Analysis and Interpretation*, Ph.D. Diss: University of Surrey, 1998. Page 258.

appreciated, avoiding the conflict generated by the chronologically ambiguous nature of the first movement.

In what is quite probably Mahler's earliest draft<sup>4</sup> of the order of the movements of the Third Symphony, there is no sign of what would later become the epic opening movement – rather, the work begins with a movement entitled '*What the forest tells me*'<sup>5</sup>. In the second draft programme, which Alma Mahler reproduces immediately after the first in her book *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, Mahler has inserted a new movement at the beginning of the symphony, in which can be seen the genesis of what would ultimately become 'Part I': '*Summer marches in (Fanfare and lively March) (Introduction) (Wind only with solo double-basses)*'.<sup>6</sup> If the draft programmes are indeed from 1893, it is two years later (during which Mahler had scored all the other movements) that Mahler comments again on the first movement, in a letter to Friedrich Löhr, dated 1895:

No. I 'Der Sommer marchiert ein', is intended to hint at the humorously subjective content. Summer is conceived in the rôle of victor – amidst all that grows and flowers, creeps and flies, thinks and yearns, and, finally, all that of which we have only an intuitive inkling (angels-bells-transcendental)...No. I is not yet done...<sup>7</sup>

This is an interesting quotation, as Mahler has already finished what would later become 'Part II' of the symphony, and is simply waiting to spend time at his composition-hut on the shores of the Attersee, where he intended to complete the rest of it. Indeed, Mahler had discussed with Natalie Bauer-Lechner how he envisaged the first movement immediately prior to beginning the composition of the rest of the symphony in the summer of 1895, saying:

"Summer draws in" will be the prelude. Straight away, I need a regimental band to give the rough and crude effect of my martial comrade's arrival. It will be just like the military band on parade. Such a mob is milling about, you never saw anything like it! Naturally, it doesn't come off without a struggle with the opponent, Winter;

<sup>4</sup> The specific date of these draft programmes is not known; Peter Franklin suggests approximately 1893.

<sup>5</sup> Mahler, Alma (ed. Donald Mitchell). *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*. London: John Murray Ltd., 1973. Page 38.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> GM to FL: Mahler, Alma (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 164/5.

but he is easily dispatched, and Summer, in his strength and superior power, soon gains undisputed mastery. This movement, treated as an introduction, is humorous, even grotesque [barock], throughout.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst Mahler may here appear to be relatively confident as to the shape of the first movement, the very fact he chose to leave its composition until after the rest of the symphony is telling. Indeed, he says at one point that the first movement is ‘...an enormous undertaking for which I don’t think I should have had the courage, had the rest not already been completed...’<sup>9</sup> The process of composition was a comparatively rapid one, but one in which the nature of the movement underwent significant alteration. In a letter dated 2 July 1896, when Mahler was already in residence at Steinbach am Attersee, he writes to Bruno Walter: ‘The titles of the first two movements, which of course are closely related, are 1. *Pan erwacht* attacca 2. *der Sommer marschiert ein*.’<sup>10</sup> This clear distinction is a relatively new feature of the movement, which Mahler had not intended earlier on in the development process. Subsequently, such a clear break between what he describes as the first and second movements would be dropped, in favour of the two-‘Part’ overall structure of the symphony, Part I consisting of an ‘Introduction’ and first movement proper. Beyond this point, a chronologically accurate account of the movement’s development becomes difficult; the process happened quickly, and the second-hand accounts by Natalie Bauer-Lechner and Alma Mahler are somewhat vague. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that the speed and ferocity of the compositional process took everyone – not least Mahler himself – by surprise. Any programmatic assertions made by Mahler before this point are swamped by the scale of the movement’s development. A comment made to Bauer-Lechner is an important point of reference in the tracing of Mahler’s compositional process – of the ‘Introduction’, he said:

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<sup>8</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 41.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* at 64.

<sup>10</sup> GM to BW: Mahler, Alma (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 189.



It has almost ceased to be music; it is hardly anything but the sounds of nature. It's eerie, the way life gradually breaks through, out of soulless, petrified matter. (I might equally well have called the movement "Was mir das Felsgebirge erzählt" ["What the mountains tell me"].)<sup>11</sup>

### **Pan-ic Imagery**

Mahler's use of the name 'Pan', first suggested in his letter to Bruno Walter, some paragraphs earlier, was added subsequently to the introductory music, which, he believed, could no longer be described as the march of summer. There is a well rehearsed anecdote regarding Mahler's stumbling across the idea of 'Pan'<sup>12</sup>, but to repeat it at length is to somewhat obscure the significance of this term, which will be considered in due course. Indeed, Mahler toyed with the idea of terming the whole symphony 'Pan, Symphonic Poems', but eventually settled, so far as the opening movement goes (according to a letter of 6 August 1896), on the following:

I. Abteilung

Einleitung: Pan erwacht

Nr. I: Der Sommer marschiert ein (Bacchuszug)<sup>13</sup>

Before the various issues suggested by the above programmatic titles are considered, it is useful to reproduce at considerable length a commentary on 'Part I' delivered by Mahler whilst he was orchestrating the movement from his completed sketches. It gives an excellent impression of how Mahler saw the development of the movement(s), and illustrates the turmoil he was experiencing, which perhaps goes some way to explaining the frequent alterations he made to the proposed titles of the movement:

"It's frightening the way this movement seems to grow of its own accord more than anything else that I have done. The Second seems to me like a child in comparison. It is in every sense larger than life, and everything human shrinks into a pygmy world beside it. Real horror seizes me when I see where it is leading, the path the music must follow, and that it fell upon me to be the bearer of this gigantic work. As sometimes a personal experience will illuminate and fully bring home to one

<sup>11</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 59.

<sup>12</sup> A letter from Anna von Mildenburg arrived for Mahler, bearing the abbreviation for the local Post Office: P[ost] A[mt] N[r.] 30.

<sup>13</sup> GM to MM: Mahler, Alma (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 189.

significance of something long known, so today it came to me in a flash: Christ on the Mount of Olives, compelled to drain the cup of sorrow to the dregs – and willing it to be so. No one for whom this cup is destined can or will refuse it, but at times a deathly fear must overcome him when he thinks of what is before him. I have the same feeling when I think of this movement, in anticipation of what I shall have to suffer because of it, without even living to see it recognized and appreciated for what it is.’

Whereas I could clarify and to a certain extent “describe” in words what happens in the other movements, that is no longer possible here; you would yourself have to plunge with me into the very depths of Nature, whose roots are grasped by music at a depth that neither art nor science can otherwise reach. And I believe that no artist suffers so much from Nature’s mystic power as does the musician when he is seized by her.

[It is like]...the Universe itself, into whose infinite depths you sink, through whose eternal spaces you soar, so that earth and human destiny shrink behind you into an indiscernibly tiny point then disappear. The greatest human questions, which I posed and attempted to answer in my Second: “Why do we exist?” and “Will we continue to exist in an after-life?” – these questions can no longer concern me here. For what they signify in the totality of things, in which *everything* lives; will and *must* live? Can a spirit that has dwelt upon the eternal creation-thoughts of the deity in such a symphony as this, die? No, one grows confident that everything is eternally and unalterably born for the good...Even human sorrow and distress has no place here any more. The most sublime cheerfulness prevails, and eternally radiant day – for gods, to be sure, and not men, for whom it is the great and terrible Unknown, something eternally ungraspable.”<sup>14</sup>

This is an enormously powerful passage, and one which somewhat emphasises the futility of attempting to derive the ‘meaning’ of the first movement (and introduction) from Mahler’s pre-composition comments. Even Mahler, as evidenced by the opening quotation of this chapter, had trouble pinpointing the movement’s ‘meaning’, but a consideration of the wide variety of terminology that he employed to elaborate upon it can bring the listener closer to a sense of comprehension. Indeed, to briefly move the discussion onto structural issues, it is worth noting, as Barham points out, that:

...Mahler expressed profound joy at recognizing what he saw as the movement’s unintentional conformity to universal forms as represented in the works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven [the much-discussed overarching Sonata Form structure], and yet was horrified at the opposing nominalist force that impelled the ‘content’ to dictate the ‘form’ in a less conventional manner apparently consummate with a Wagnerian dramatic-expressive idiom, although he leaves the comparison unstated.<sup>15</sup>

‘Pan’ is certainly the most striking term – or name – invoked by Mahler in his various discussions of the development of the work, and, indeed, seems to have held a

<sup>14</sup> An account of a conversation between GM and NBL on 4 July 1896, in ‘Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 61/2.

<sup>15</sup> Barham, Jeremy M., *Mahler’s Third Symphony and the Philosophy of Gustav Fechner: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Criticism, Analysis and Interpretation*, Ph.D. Diss: University of Surrey, 1998. Page 315.

uniquely important position in Mahler's overall opinion of the work, remembering his enthusiasm to name the entire symphony 'Pan, symphonic poems'. In response to Anna von Mildenburg (whose original letter bore the postmark P.A.N), Mahler explains that Pan was, '...as you know...the name of a Greek divinity that subsequently symbolized the essential nature of All Things (*Pan*, Greek for 'everything')'<sup>16</sup>, a statement which emphasises his interest both in the concept of Pan as god, but also the broader – 'All Things' – connotations of the term. A further level of imagery is applied by Mahler in reference to the 'Introduction', when he states:

The title "Summer marches in" no longer fits the shape of things in this introduction; "Pans Zug" ["Pan's Procession"] would possibly be better – not the procession of Dionysus! It is not in Dionysian mood; on the contrary, satyrs and other such rough children of nature disport themselves in it.<sup>17</sup>

For Mahler to suggest that the introduction is *not* 'the procession of Dionysus!' strongly implies that at one stage he had considered this as an option. Mahler nevertheless settled on 'Pan awakes' as the programmatic title for the introductory section, introducing the idea of a 'Bacchic procession' for the rest of the movement. Peter Franklin suggests that:

It properly matched the intended mood of Nietzschean *Heiterkeit* that this summer-march, heir to the egalitarian judgement-march of the Second, should become a *Bacchic* procession. Its merrily intoxicated participants were to stride into battle under the banner of Pan, the lazy and goat-like old fertility god whose 'simplicity and love of riot' were despised by the Olympian gods who nevertheless exploited his powers.<sup>18</sup>

Merry intoxication is far from the mood of the very opening of the symphony, however, which commences with a proud horn motif. The symbolism of this horn-call is significant, and multifaceted. Deryck Cooke says of the movement as a whole:

To express the primeval force of nature burgeoning out of winter into summer, he built and outsize, proliferating sonata structure out of a plethora of 'primitive'

<sup>16</sup> GM to AvM: Mahler, Alma (ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins & Ernst Kaiser). *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* London: Faber & Faber, 1979. Page 190.

<sup>17</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 59.

<sup>18</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 80.

material: a rugged F major – D minor march tune for unison horns, like a great summons to awake...<sup>19</sup>

The term ‘primeval’ is a popular one in discussion of this horn motif, and it is not difficult to see why. Perhaps just as important as the noble theme declaimed by the horns, however, is the silence into which it echoes. Somehow, in the six opening bars of the symphony, Mahler manages to make the total nothingness of ‘before’ just as important a characteristic of the beginning of the work as the horn-call itself. In doing so, a profound ‘something’ is set against an equally profound ‘nothing’, creating an effect in which the ‘something’ becomes awe inspiring. Undoubtedly, however, the effect of the very opening horn-call upon the audiences who listen to it has changed significantly since its first performances (See Ex. 10).



Ex. 10

Michael Kennedy suggests a way of listening to ‘Part I’ that ‘...eschews analysis and concentrates instead on absorbing its atmosphere, its astonishing creation of a mood of protean energy unleashed’<sup>20</sup> – a description which perhaps accurately describes the way in which the modern listener can appreciate particularly the opening of the movement. Listeners in Mahler’s time, however, would have found this kind of appreciation at one remove more difficult because of the similarity between the opening theme with a well-known folk song of the time. This song had been adapted to serve a political purpose:

...with August Binzer’s text, ‘We had built a stately house’...the song had been sung by defiant students on 20 December 1878, following the government’s decision to dissolve the *Leseverein* on grounds of its danger to the state.<sup>21</sup>

Mahler was certainly well aware of the connotations of this song, and to use it at the very beginning of the symphony is a powerful statement. Unfortunately, there is no real

<sup>19</sup> Cooke, Deryck. *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to His Music*, London: Faber Music Ltd., 1980. Page 64.

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, Michael. *The Dent Master Musicians: Mahler*, London: J.M. Dent, 1993. Page 125.

<sup>21</sup> Franklin, Peter, *Mahler: Symphony No.3*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Page 81.

account of Mahler's own thinking on this issue, but it is appropriate to suggest that Mahler's allusion was to the politically appropriated version of the song (rather than the original – relatively innocuous – children's folk song), and as such, '...meant that the symphony was more than a little susceptible of a leftist, even socialist reading...'<sup>22</sup>

For Mahler to have allowed his symphony to begin with what would have been seen at the time as a fairly overt political statement suggests that he saw the work as a whole as fulfilling a greater function than that normally associated with such artworks. This is a suggestion which functions well with the idea that in 'Part II' of the symphony – particularly the *Adagio* – Mahler not only attacks the conventional conception of the creative hierarchy and subsequent afterlife, but suggests a Nietzschean alternative of self-overcoming. Remembering that in the 1890s, Nietzsche's work had not yet been subject to critical evaluation, but rather was very much a new and exciting realm of ideas, Franklin's assertion that Mahler almost certainly viewed 'Part I' of the Third Symphony as a '...tangible *contribution* to [1890s Nietzscheanism]...' <sup>23</sup> is a convincing one, and one which calls to mind Carl Niekerk's similar claim that Mahler almost certainly saw his Second Symphony as a contribution in the debate raging (primarily) between Wagner, Nietzsche and Lipiner, about which he clearly states the prime points of contention: '...nature's symbolism; tragic denial versus affirmation of life; how to understand pantheism.'<sup>24</sup>

The opening horn motif, therefore, was originally intended to fulfil a dual function, one 'prong' of which, so to speak, has become significantly diminished as time has past. To take Kennedy's advice, and to simply 'absorb' the music is fine as far as it goes, but to purposefully ignore the contemporaneous implications of Mahler's

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<sup>22</sup> Franklin, Peter. 'A Stranger's Story: Programmes, Politics and Mahler's Third Symphony'. In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, 171-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Page 175.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid at 182.

<sup>24</sup> Niekerk, Carl. *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*. New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 92.

choice of melody is foolish, and can only serve to contribute to a skewed reading of the work. Nevertheless, the other ‘prong’ of Mahler’s dual-function introductory passage is firmly Pan-ic, and this is to where discussion must now return.

Deryck Cooke sums up his interpretation of ‘Part I’ thus: ‘The vast first movement was to represent the summoning of Nature out of non-existence by the god Pan, symbolized by the emergence of summer out of the dead world of winter...’<sup>25</sup>, firmly positioning the movement as a product of the mentality that Mahler was undoubtedly in when he was considering naming the whole symphony after the god. In this reading, the opening horn-call is seen as representative of some form of action or statement emanating from Pan which somehow begins the process of creation. Whilst the seasonal imagery is distinct, such a literal reading of the horn-call is quite obviously drawing heavily on Christian thought; the Christian God brought ‘things’ into existence through the power of the ‘word’ – that is, a spoken commandment for things to be so – Cooke interprets the horn motif as Pan’s equivalent. Such an interpretation draws too literally on the parallel Christian imagery, but the idea of the opening horn-call as somehow representative of the might of Pan is certainly an appropriate one. Certainly, whatever it represents, the horn-call is ‘something’, to silence’s ‘nothing’ – in a Pan-ic context, ‘life’ to ‘lifelessness’.

To begin to use the terminology of ‘life’ moves discussion firmly into the realm of Schopenhauer, for, as McGrath suggests, ‘...Pan’s awakening symbolizes the newly born life-will struggling into existence against the forces of lifeless nature...’<sup>26</sup>. It does not, however, remain in this realm for long, for Mahler’s Nietzschean-infused thinking could not allow the negative Schopenhauerian conception of the will to life to triumph

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<sup>25</sup> Cooke, Deryck. *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to His Music*, London: Faber Music Ltd., 1980. Page 63.

<sup>26</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 136.

in a symphony which will ultimately conclude positively (or had already done so, if one is to consider the order of composition).

‘Pan awakes’, the programmatic title for the introductory section to the first movement, therefore represents for Mahler something more than simply a musical account of the emergence of life from an otherwise lifeless nature, with all the imagery of Winter-to-Summer that he employs. On a more profound level, Mahler is setting up a conflict between the interpretation of nature that is based on a Schopenhauerian (and by definition, negative) reading of the nature of Being, and a more Nietzschean, positivist, approach. As Franklin suggests:

All Mahler’s allegorical, quasi-programmatic descriptions of this movement support the inference that the joyfully impetuous march of life represented for him a musical image of a positively interpreted ‘nature.’ Nietzschean optimism and a kind of idealistic egalitarianism meet in this march to rout the more negatively constructed, Schopenhauer-orientated Nature of the introductory music of the Will.<sup>27</sup>

The ‘joyfully impetuous march of life’ to which Franklin refers is the second part of the movement, entitled ‘Summer marches in’. This is a conflict on the most profound level; between two differing interpretations of Nature, one positive and one negative. The ‘routing’ of the Schopenhauerian interpretation was a conscious tactic employed by Mahler to make quite clear the direction of the symphony – he does not simply suggest a positive interpretation, but actively seeks to destroy the negative, an idea which will be revisited in the final *Adagio*.

Of course, the imagery that Mahler employs, both at various stages in the compositional process, as well as subsequently, is enormously diverse, as Natalie Bauer-Lechner suggests in the opening quotation of this chapter. Such diversity is unsurprising, given the profound nature of the subject matter, but it does make a claim that the first movement is Nietzschean through-and-through difficult to justify. Even in

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<sup>27</sup> Franklin, Peter. ‘A Stranger’s Story: Programmes, Politics and Mahler’s Third Symphony’. In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, 171-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Page 180.

Franklin's quotation used in the previous paragraph, he claims only that 'Nietzschean optimism' plays a *part* in the 'routing' of the opposing view, not that Mahler creates a fundamentally Nietzschean second part of the first movement. Nevertheless, Mahler, in his own discussion of this second part uses terminology which position the first movement firmly in the territory of Nietzsche's *BT*; by describing the procession as 'Bacchic', he immediately invites an interpretation based on Nietzsche's claims regarding the Greek proto-tragedy.

The influence of the subtitle given by Mahler to his symphony as a whole – *A Summer Noon-Day's Dream* – becomes clear when one recalls that the god Pan is noted for having slept at this time. McGrath suggests that:

It is clear, then, that the two parts of the symphony are intended to present the two differing phases of Pan's experience. In the first, Pan's awakening symbolizes the newly born life-will struggling into existence against the forces of lifeless nature, and this is then followed by a Bacchic victory procession. In the second section the music communicates Pan's midday dream, inspired by the Dionysian intoxication of the procession.<sup>28</sup>

To consider this in the context of the overall title which Mahler at various points wished to attribute to the symphony – *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* – is to raise the (significant and persuasive) possibility that, by framing it within a dream, Mahler is mocking the hierarchical structure described in movements II-V, contrasting it with the idea that nature cannot be interpreted rationally – that chaos is its nature, and to assert otherwise is foolish.

In giving the section entitled 'Summer marches in' the subtitle 'Bacchic procession', Mahler applies a level of imagery which proves useful in considering the Nietzschean nature of this movement. The implications of the term 'Bacchic' are clear and significant, lending an air of chaoticism and humour to a movement that begins undeniably seriously. Furthermore, the term 'Bacchic' and its musical implications can certainly be said to lend the music a sense of ruggedness – perhaps a more 'natural' feel.

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<sup>28</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 136.



In Nietzschean terms, connections may usefully be drawn between this imagery and that of the Dionysian element of music, as discussed in *BT*. This assertion is not clear-cut, however – one may remember Mahler's counter-assertion that: 'It is not in Dionysian mood; on the contrary, satyrs and other such rough children of nature disport themselves in it.'<sup>29</sup> This is a very problematic statement on Mahler's part; whilst he may not have intended it to be Dionysian in mood, its very nature invites such comparisons. This imagery – of an unruly group 'disporting' themselves at will may be traced to before composition proper of the movement had begun; in a conversation with Natalie Bauer-Lechner, reproduced at length earlier in this chapter<sup>30</sup>, Mahler suggests that: 'Such a mob is milling about, you never saw anything like it!' Whilst the nature of this 'mob' may have changed in the process of composition, the fact that the idea survives at all is significant. The concept of the collective is, however, multifaceted. Peter Franklin suggests a unique interpretation of the importance of the 'mob':

The fact that we are structurally at the start of the final march span of the development section, including the extraordinary 'Battle begins' and 'Southern storm' episodes, leads us to assume that we have here Mahler's clearest and most naturalistic characterization of the milling 'mob' he had described to Natalie. The German word Natalie quotes is even added in his score annotation, 'Das Gesindel!' (the rabble), at Fig.44. What thickens the plot is the fact that a section of *Also sprach Zarathustra* is entitled 'Vom Gesindel' (of the rabble) – one in which Zarathustra expresses his spiritual aspiration to fly away from and above the rabble, described as 'unclean', their grinning mouths bearing a 'repulsive smile'.<sup>31</sup>

This extended quotation is included because it places the emphasis of the importance of the 'mob' or 'rabble' squarely in the realm of *TSZ*, rather than *BT*. This is typical of Mahler's tendency to utilise imagery which can, or should, be interpreted in two distinct, yet related ways. Franklin goes on, however, to suggest a reading which knits this interpretation of the 'rabble' as something grotesque and to be escaped with a *BT* grounded subsumation; suggesting that, at Fig.49, 'The 'rabble' is surely drawn into the

<sup>29</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 59.

<sup>30</sup> See p.108 above.

<sup>31</sup> Franklin, Peter. 'A Stranger's Story: Programmes, Politics and Mahler's Third Symphony'. In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, 171-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Page 181.

march in a community of purpose...'<sup>32</sup> Such a 'drawing in' immediately shifts discussion back towards the *BT*-espoused idea of the Greek proto-tragedy.

Connectedly, the role of the *chorus* for Nietzsche is a crucial one, whose purpose was to draw the in the audience as participants:

...and then [project] its Apollonian vision of the god into the center of the celebration. The effect of this, according to Nietzsche, was to make the individual aware of himself as part of all being (the assumption into the chorus) and then to allow him to transcend willing and find peace in reunion with the All (the Apollonian vision).<sup>33</sup>

This idea functions on two levels, however; first is the 'drawing in' of the 'rabble' into the communal march – a unification of outlook and purpose, which, according to Franklin, takes place at Fig.49. The second level is described by William McGrath thus:

If Mahler did indeed model his symphony on the structure of a Greek prototragedy, a primary function of the Bacchic celebration at the close of the first movement would be to draw the audience into the chorus of celebrants; and a comparison of Mahler's comments on his work with the work itself yields evidence that this was his intention...<sup>34</sup>

He goes on to claim that:

...in characterizing the Bacchic procession as roaring ever closer and "swelling like a landslide until the entire tumult and the entire exaltation pours over you," [Mahler] is suggesting that absorption of the audience into the Satyric celebration which would be appropriate to the first part of a Greek prototragedy.<sup>35</sup>

These are the two levels upon which there is an experience of the collective in 'Part I' – the audience being absorbed into the chorus; both directly and indirectly. There is, however, one final level upon which this imagery of an absorption into the collective by the power of Dionysian music, and that is with regards to the composer himself.

Just as wide ranging as scholarly hypotheses on 'Part I' of the Third Symphony are Mahler's own programmatic assertions. Indeed, the diversity of these assertions –

<sup>32</sup> Franklin, Peter. 'A Stranger's Story: Programmes, Politics and Mahler's Third Symphony'. In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, 171-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Page 181.

<sup>33</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 136.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

so diverse that they are often contradictory – is the reason that there is rarely agreement on any aspect of the movement. In the great debate about whether Mahler's music ought to be considered programmatic – ought to be appreciated in light of his published and unpublished programmes, letters to inquisitive audience-members and private comments to friends and family – this movement stands alone. Mahler, through his multifarious comments on the symphony as a whole, and particularly 'Part I' has created a vast body of information which it would be irresponsible to ignore. Nevertheless, 'Part I' of the Third Symphony is, undoubtedly, a catastrophic failure of programmaticism – the point at which programmatic definitions become less a help, less even a hindrance and more an active threat to the true meaning of the work. Mahler certainly had *ideas* about the function he wanted his opening movement to perform, as evidenced by the reproduction of his comments and letters in this chapter, but these ideas are certainly not definable as a 'programme'. In making comments such as:

It's frightening the way this movement seems to grow of its own accord more than anything else that I have done...Real horror seizes me when I see where it is leading, the path the music must follow, and that it fell upon me to be the bearer of this gigantic work.<sup>36</sup>

- Mahler aptly illustrates the futility of regarding any of his pre-compositional comments as representative of the movement. At best, they represent a seed; a seed from which something magnificent will undoubtedly grow, but the nature of which is unknown until that growth process is well underway. Following its composition, Mahler makes a similar claim: 'Whereas I could clarify and to a certain extent "describe" in words what happens in the other movements, that is no longer possible here...'<sup>37</sup> Were scholars to take Mahler at his word, this would pose a significant problem; not only would his comments pre-composition have to be discounted based on his description of the nature of the compositional process as something which he was not

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<sup>36</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 61.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

master of, but all his post-compositional explanations could equally not be afforded any level of significance, in the light of the above comment. This, of course, cannot happen, and an evaluation of Mahler's own comments is simply essential. Nevertheless, he offers an alternative – '...you would yourself have to plunge with me into the very depths of Nature, whose roots are grasped by music at a depth that neither art nor science can otherwise reach.'<sup>38</sup> – which itself is a useful contribution to the debate over 'meaning'.

That Mahler suggests that the only way to fully appreciate 'Part I' is to 'plunge into the very depths of Nature' is enormously telling; even more so when one considers that comment in light of his thoughts regarding the compositional process. In ceding control of both the compositional process and the subsequent appreciation of the outcome, and in speaking of the completed movement as something that one can only understand *as a participant, not an observer*, Mahler epitomises '...exactly what Nietzsche described as the experience of one who has been drawn into the Satyr's chorus by the power of Dionysian music.'<sup>39</sup> This is the 'third level' upon which this movement may be described as fundamentally Nietzschean.

The difficulty of distilling a concrete 'meaning' for 'Part I' has been well documented, in this chapter and elsewhere. To take a step back, however, and to survey the chaotic nature of Mahler's programmatic pronouncements is perhaps to alight on one of the key ideas in this movement; that of 'chaos'. The chaotic nature of the 'mob' or 'rabble' has already been discussed, and is of significant importance; it is a surface-level manifestation of chaos that is a pointer towards the more fundamentally chaotic nature of the movement. If, at its most basic level, one appreciates that this movement is

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<sup>38</sup> Bauer-Lechner, Natalie (trans. Dika Newlin). *Recollections of Gustav Mahler*, London: Faber & Faber. Page 61.

<sup>39</sup> McGrath, William J., *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1974. Page 136.

somehow ‘about’ Nature, then the importance of chaos in a Nietzschean sense rapidly becomes clear. As Carl Niekerk points out:

In Nietzsche’s analysis, humankind’s attitude toward nature is driven by a desire to read something into nature that is fundamentally not there. In fragment no. 109 [of *TGS*], Nietzsche writes of the error in thinking that the world is like an organism: “The total character of the world...is for all eternity chaos”; any attempt to find order is aesthetic and anthropomorphic. Nietzsche is very sceptical regarding attempts to read a teleology into nature.<sup>40</sup>

This is crucially important; if the ‘total character of the world’ is chaotic, then a chaotic interpretation of ‘Part I’ of the Third Symphony is entirely appropriate. The reason this movement is so vast, and so difficult to distil into a pithy programmatic distinction is because it is *supposed* to be chaotic. It does not limit itself to an appropriate scale in line with the rest of the symphony, because that is not the way of Nature. Jeremy Barham crucially suggests, in language which stops short of invoking the term ‘chaos’, that:

In fact, the continual slippage in this relationship between the poles of ‘conformity’ and ‘disjunction’ ...is [the first movement’s] striking central characteristic.<sup>41</sup>

‘Part I’ of the Third Symphony cannot be particularly constructively defined as ‘programmatic’, therefore – it transcends such definitions. There is, however, an undeniably powerful Nietzschean quality to it; but terms such as ‘fundamentally Nietzschean’ are not useful – the movement is not a reproduction of Nietzsche’s thinking, but is rather a contribution to the Nietzschean discourse which was prevalent at the time of composition. Perhaps the most obvious signpost of Nietzscheanism in the movement is the subsumation of the ‘rabble’ in the march material, mirroring the drawing-in of the audience into the chorus. But, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, this is only the most visible example of so-called ‘drawing-in’; both the listening audience and Mahler himself were subject to it on a more profound level.

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<sup>40</sup> Niekerk, Carl, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, New York: Camden House, 2010. Page 105/6.

<sup>41</sup> Barham, Jeremy M., *Mahler’s Third Symphony and the Philosophy of Gustav Fechner: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Criticism, Analysis and Interpretation*, Ph.D. Diss: University of Surrey, 1998. Page 265.

Because of the unique nature of the creation of 'Part I', it defies strict programmatic interpretation. As such, to engage with the movement is not to seek a written programme to 'follow' – not to prepare oneself prior to listening, but simply to take Mahler at his word, and plunge, with him, into Nature. This must be executed less recklessly than this sort of rhetorical language suggests, however: one must be fully familiar with the intellectual and cultural terrain of the era in which the movement was composed. This, then, is perhaps the essence of the reason for reading Mahler's comments and various interpretations of the symphony; to do so is to acquaint oneself with Mahler's landscape of thought – not to seek the 'key' to the movement, but to give oneself the opportunity to view the movement as authentically as possible, to adopt the Mahlerian mindset, if you will. If, then, this movement is to be viewed 'authentically' in terms of meaning, it is necessary to do the same in terms of strictly compositional influences. Indeed, there is a certain parallel between Mahler's 'landscape of thought' and the similar terrain of compositional influence – Barham magisterially illustrates this constellation of influence:

...by reifying contrasting compositional processes Mahler's movement engages critically with its musical-symphonic past. A declamatory and expressive-dramatic Wagnerian style, the Brahmsian developmental teleology of sonata form derived from Beethoven, and Bruckner's monumentality of form and thematic character as well as his static juxtaposition of monolithic blocks of material (often punctuated by silences), which challenge the part-whole relationship, are all posited and questioned in a compendium-like fashion appropriate to the aesthetic comprehensiveness of the work as a whole.<sup>42</sup>

In this movement, therefore, Mahler critically engages with his compositional influences rather than slavishly following them, an assertion which, in a sense, supports the notion that the imagery of Pan as discussed above is both important and useful, but ought never to be regarded as anything other than that: imagery. Such imagery allows Mahler to portray the 'central' movements – II-V – as a 'dream', and therefore hint at their status

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<sup>42</sup> Barham, Jeremy M., *Mahler's Third Symphony and the Philosophy of Gustav Fechner: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Criticism, Analysis and Interpretation*, Ph.D. Diss: University of Surrey, 1998. Page 323.

as inauthentic. Whilst the movement is certainly an interaction on Mahler's part with Nietzschean ideas, it can in no-way be described as fundamentally Pan-ic, however strong the imagery. In a way, that Pan-ic imagery can almost be discarded once the true nature of the movement – and the symphony – has been grasped; when one knows the terrain of a particular area well enough, maps and signposts become redundant.

# Conclusion

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The previous chapters of this thesis have dealt at length with the individual movements of Mahler's Third Symphony. Where appropriate, they have structurally analysed particular aspects of those movements, but more often, they have engaged in a conceptual discussion of those 'extra-musical' ideas that are both explicit and implicit in the symphony as a whole.

The Third Symphony is generally considered to be made up of two 'parts', the first consisting of only the first movement, and the second made up of movements II-VI. This thesis, however, has set forward a reading of the Third Symphony which understands it as three groups; the first consisting of 'Part I', the second consisting of movements II-V, and the third consisting of the last movement: the *Adagio*. The second group – movements II-V – are an articulation of the hierarchy of creation as conventionally recognised, in which the base level is represented by the inanimate flowers of the second movement, and which ascends, through animals to man, and culminates with angels. Mahler is not, however, simply programmatically reproducing that hierarchy and leaving it at that; fundamentally, the second group *mocks* that hierarchy, and makes it clear that it is *foolish* to regard that depiction of creation as true. This rejection of what is being depicted is conducted on many levels; the most subtle can be found in the second movement, where he subverts the conventional *Minuet* form, infusing what is often regarded as a relatively innocuous movement with the first signs of a Nietzschean subtext. This subversion continues into the third movement, where he offers a critique of the pastoral style evoked in both movements two and three; strongly suggesting the sinister *Wunderhorn* song *Ablösung im Sommer*, and alternating anthropomorphic images of animals with a seemingly beautiful posthorn solo, which is the most explicit example of the all-pervading (negative) influence of *man*,



demonstrating the destructive tension inherent between animals and man in the hierarchical Chain of Being he seeks to mock.

The fourth movement sees the introduction of *text*, which is, in this case, the *Midnight Song* from *TSZ*. The text is articulated by a solo voice; as important as the text itself, is, therefore, the introduction of *mankind* into the hierarchy. Mahler, however, adjusts the text: whereas in its original form it suggests a longing for eternity, demonstrating that quality required to attain the status of *Übermensch*, Mahler removes this idea of longing, and in doing so subtly emphasises the impossibility of self-overcoming within the creative framework he is criticising. The fifth movement is inextricably linked to the fourth, not least through a continuity of voice, in the form of the alto soloist. This movement is a quasi-cinematographic view of a corporate religious event, which Mahler observes and criticises; it is, in short, a depiction of a popular ‘false alternative’ – a way mankind consoles itself faced with the misery of existence that is the result of not achieving that longing for eternity discussed in the fourth movement.

These four movements together are an articulation and criticism of the conventional Chain of Being. Mahler employs a vast range of techniques, discussed at length in the previous chapters, to hint at, and on occasion make quite obvious, the fact that this group is not a simple programmatic depiction of creation. But the subversion and criticism inherent in these movements is put into context by the first ‘group’, made up of ‘Part I’ of the symphony.

The first movement has been interpreted countless different ways, but many interpretations find themselves entangled in intricate arguments about various comments made by Mahler post-composition. It is vital to realise that all of the ‘Pan’ imagery is just that: imagery. At its most fundamental level, ‘Part I’ is a statement of the Schopenhauerian, pessimistic idea of the ‘will-to-live’, and then, through sometimes

quite overt Nietzschean pronouncements, a subsequent statement of intent; that this symphony fully rejects such a pessimistic reading, and will set forward a Nietzschean-influenced, optimistic way of comprehending the nature of Being. Invoking Pan, and using the subtitle ‘A Summer Noon-Day’s Dream’ allows Mahler to frame ‘Group Two’ as just that: Pan’s dream - in other words, that the hierarchical depiction of creation contained therein is *unreal*.

The final movement of the symphony – the sixth: *Adagio* – stands alone, forming ‘Group Three’. This movement is no longer part of the dream, but rather is Mahler’s strongly Nietzschean offering of the real alternative to the unreal world depicted in the dream. This movement – the climax of the symphony – demonstrates through its thematic discourse a reconciliation of the Apolline and Dionysiac, and a triumphant articulation of self-overcoming, wherein man casts off the ‘old’ system, and truly wills eternity, finally achieving the ultimate goal for himself: to be called *Übermensch*.

This reading of the Third Symphony – as fundamentally tri-partite, – has considered in depth Mahler’s own programmes, his many letters and conversations regarding the work, as well as many other scholars’ interpretations. The conclusion it reaches however, has avoided the popular and simplistic tendency to define the symphony as ‘fundamentally’ something – be that ‘Nietzschean’, ‘Christian’ or any other definitive label. Such detailed study of all of Mahler’s comments on the work is absolutely essential, but the reason for doing so is not to try to somehow ‘narrow down’ the enormous field of material in order to pinpoint a specific meaning hidden somewhere in that information. The purpose of doing so is to gain a sense of the cultural and intellectual landscape of the time, as a result of which, a more informed reading of the work can emerge. The reading that this thesis articulates is one which is

based on the assumption that Mahler engaged with Nietzsche's thinking *first hand*; and as such allows for the possibility of a Mahlerian interpretation which is at odds with subsequent criticism of Nietzsche's thought. He viewed his composition as a *contribution* to the discourse engendered by Nietzsche's thought, and Nietzschean ideas within the work are drawn from a wide range of his publications.

Mahler's Third Symphony is a magisterial work. Functioning within a tripartite structure, it rejects the conventional, Christianly-inspired, reading of the nature of creation as hierarchy, but also rejects the fundamentally pessimistic Schopenhauerian notion of an unavoidably painful human condition. Rather, it deconstructs such ideas in its second group, before, in the final movement, articulating what Mahler perceives as the true alternative – at its climax, the *Adagio* offers a complete self-overcoming; the reconciliation of the Apolline and Dionysiac permits man to reject the *principium individuationis*, and to realise the *true* nature of things – his *oneness* with nature. This serves as the catalyst for ultimate goal: the ability to achieve the status of *Übermensch*. Imagery and programmes can certainly help the listener get his bearings, but too often they are allowed to obscure the true meaning of the work, and a true understanding can only be achieved when those programmes are discarded, and the music is *engaged with*, not simply 'interpreted'. This thesis, therefore, attempts to engage with Mahler without seeing as its quest the discovery of what is too often sought in Mahler scholarship – an elusive 'key' to the music, a musical Enigma-machine, with the help of which, the listener can suddenly 'understand'. Of course, it suggests a certain reading of the Third Symphony – that is, after all, the whole point of this study – but it does so in a way which emphasises the *living* nature of Mahler's interaction with philosophical, social, political and musical influences, and encourages the listener to *engage* with the music,

for, if there is one fundamental argument which transcends consideration of a particular symphony, it is that, as Adorno suggests:

Mahler can only be seen in perspective by moving still closer to him, by entering into the music and confronting the incommensurable presence that defies the stylistic categories of program and absolute music...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. (trans. Edmund Jephcott). *Mahler: A Music Physiognomy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Page 4.

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